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**AESTHETIC ETHICS IN THE *DE
RERUM NATURA* OF LUCRETIUS**

**THESIS PRESENTED
FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
IN THE FACULTY OF CLASSICAL STUDIES**

by

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ABSTRACT

The avowed purpose of Lucretius' poem is the ethical conversion of the reader, but ethics comes a very poor second to the physics in apparent importance within the text. This thesis argues that for Lucretius ethics is closely linked to aesthetics in the following ways: 1) ethics for Lucretius is a matter of seeing the truth about the world and thus relies on our senses and *αἴσθησις* 2) the wise man is advised to watch the world aesthetically with all its sufferings rather than become involved in politics and love himself, the aesthetic appreciation of the spectacle being recommended as the ethically correct way to live. This last is a theatrical stance and is well supported by Lucretius' debt to the theatre which underlies so much of the poem; the poem draws on the theatre as a metaphor and simile as well as using examples drawn from plays, both tragic and comic, in preference to taking ethical examples from Roman 'life'. The status of the wise man looking down is also close to that of the Homeric gods and gives the poet and the reader the divine life which the text promises both in the freedom from fear and pain and also in the serene appreciation of the world as an aesthetic phenomenon; it also explains the sense in which Epicurus is seen in the poem as divine.

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CHAPTER ONE: THE PROBLEM

The *de rerum natura* is a poem whose avowed purpose is to change the way we live, and whose poetry is presented as ancillary to the message which it propounds¹. This thesis is asking a fundamentally simple question: 'what is the good life towards which the text appears to be directing the reader?' The thesis starts from the position that previous readings of the *de rerum natura* have not succeeded in accommodating the conflicts, inconsistencies and apparent inadequacies of the text as a protreptic poem, but that an alternative reading might make more sense, a reading which I am choosing to call 'aesthetic'. The definition and use of the term 'aesthetic' will be discussed in detail shortly: the first task is to show the need for this thesis.

The primary problem is the status of ethical teaching in the didactic syllabus of the poem and also the sort of ethics being propounded. The poem, after all, appears to be addressed to the poet's own Roman audience and claims to aim to change the way we live and to be a recipe for happiness, and yet there is a serious lack of consistent ethical advice targeted at the Roman reader.

In the first place there is far more factual science than ethical advice. If one examines the 7,415 lines of the poem, one soon

¹

1.936-950 = 4. 10-25

discovers that only about 823 lines are explicitly ethical², leaving 6,592 lines of 'pure' science. 89% of the text is thus concerned with science rather than the ethical advice which is its avowed purpose, and much of it (e.g. magnets and waterspouts in book 6) has no obvious ethical relevance. The poem's very title of *de rerum natura* is eloquent of this confusion; it suggests that this poem is going to be descriptive rather than prescriptive, examining the nature of things rather than telling us how to live - a promise he more than lives up to - and yet the poet assures us³ that his purpose is to change our lives as well as to show us things. The two ideas mingle together in the text, so that we are sometimes promised the reward of being rid of fear and thus given happiness⁴, at other times we are offered enlightenment, knowledge and insight for its own sake⁵, and one purpose of this thesis is to explain the unity of this apparent clash of ideas.

Many responses have been made to the ethical poverty of the poem. In the first place, it is urged that the science is there to prove the atomism which explains the nature of the world, ourselves included; ethical propositions are as deducible from the atomic facts as any other propositions in a universe made up entirely of atoms, and it is important for the Epicurean to demonstrate that his ethical

² The passages are: 1. 80-135, 2.1-61, 3.31-93, 830-1094, 4. 1058-1287, 5. 1117-1135, 1151-1240, 1390-1435.

³ e.g. 1. 931-50, 2.1-61

⁴ e.g. 2.55-61

⁵ 1. 143-5

statements are based on solid atomic facts and are not simply emotional states of mind. Furthermore, as Costa⁶ puts it:

'The moral ideas of the Epicureans - the value they placed on friendship, their contented quietism, even their unusual definition of pleasure as the standard of conduct - could probably be grasped in essence by the serious inquirer. But Atomist physics were technically difficult to the point of obscurity; they needed skilful, patient exposition; they were a real challenge to a poet; and success in explaining them should lead logically to an acceptance of Epicurus' moral teaching.'

It could, in particular, be urged that a great deal of the 'science' in the poem is tilted against the theological interpretation of the world and thus is aimed at replacing the view of the world as ruled by whimsical angry deities with a mechanistic picture which would remove our fear of the gods and thus aid our ethical development by substituting *ratio* for fear. Mankind is not (in fact) subject to sudden attacks of divine wrath and so our decisions can be taken rationally on the basis of known facts rather than irrationally out of fear of the unknown:

hunc igitur terrorem animi tenebrasque necessest
non radii solis neque lucida tela diei
discutiant, sed naturae species ratioque.⁷

⁶ Costa (1984) xvi-xvii

⁷ 1. 146-148

This argument in particular would 'reclaim' the theological and meteorological arguments for the ethical side and help to redress the balance; and ethical points do peep out from behind the most scientific curtains - one thinks immediately of the sacrificed calf causing grief to its bereaved mother to demonstrate the finitude of atomic variety and also attack the superstition of sacrifice⁸. These are certainly all good arguments to justify the presence of science in the poem at all - and they raise interesting questions about the nature of didactic poetry - but they do not fully exhaust the need to explain the overwhelming weight of science and the paucity of ethical teaching in the text.

For it is not merely quantity of ethical teaching which is missed, but also quality. A quick look at the ethics of the poem shows it to boil down to a negative series of satirical warnings against certain forms of extreme behaviour (love, politics, religion) and a few generalised pictures of happiness in rural settings avoiding luxury for the sake of peaceful simplicity. The passages referred to above in footnote 2 contain the following ethical precepts;

1. 80-135: religion brings fear and cruelty with it (Iphigenia), all of which should be avoided.

2.1-61: avoid engagement in war, trade, politics; avoid luxury and through philosophy pursue simple life free of fear

3.31-93: fear of death causes avarice, ambition, cruelty, envy; so avoid the fear of death.

830-1094 adopt a 'philosophical' attitude to death; allegoresis of mythical sinners tormented as types of inadequate living humans tormented with superstition (Tantalus), passion (Tityos), ambition (Sisyphus), discontent (Danaids), all of which are to be avoided.

4. 1058-1287: the perils of romantic love and the joys of contented philosophical cohabitation.

5. 1117-1135, 1151-1240, 1390-1435: description of the ambition for power, of true religion over against superstition, and the nature of true pleasure over against luxury.

Ethical philosophy usually concerns itself with far more than this. There is the whole question of political involvement (or lack of it), the wise man's attitude to the state and the laws, political freedom and stability; then the competing claims of friendship and love and the wise man's attitude to attachments in general and his pursuit of *autarkeia*, including the place (if any) of altruism over against self-interest. Many of these issues are debated by Epicurus, and all of them are discussed by Plato and Aristotle; none of which is found in this poem. Instead we have rather dogmatic statements dotted through the text with no attempt to reach an argued conclusion but rather a series of mocking sketches. If one looks at Lucretius' contemporary Cicero - or the inscription of the later Epicurean Diogenes of Oenoanda⁹ - one finds in their ethical writings a great deal more discussion and logic than one finds here. Most decisive of all is

the evidence from Diogenes Laertius of the amount of ethical writing in the work of the master himself, Epicurus; of the 41 titles listed in his famous 'three hundred rolls'¹⁰, 14 are certainly 'ethical' and a further 13 may well be. This is a far more plausible ratio of ethics to physics, of between 34% and 66% ethical content, and it is his ethical ideas which prompted the greatest discussion in the ancient world.

All too often in the case of Lucretius, then, the ethical position on issues such as kingship has to be inferred from other ideas which are there rather than simply read from the text. Furthermore the style of the poet in these ethical sections is more caricature of types such as the insane lover¹¹, the bored rich man¹², the politician¹³, the impotent man¹⁴, the society madam¹⁵, the pantomime villains who will murder their own kinsfolk for power¹⁶, the rich addicted to their luxury¹⁷, kings who murder their daughters to make the wind blow¹⁸ (a safely remote example from Greek mythology). The examples chosen are often exaggerated types drawn from the theatre rather than real examples of Roman life in need of conversion: to condemn irrational superstition, for instance, Lucretius tells the story of Iphigenia being slaughtered by her father, when he could surely have found examples of religious atrocities in his own era such as the human sacrifice

⁹ see now Smith (1993)
¹⁰ Diogenes Laertius 10. 26-8
¹¹ 4. 1058-1191
¹² 3. 1060-7
¹³ 3. 995-1002
¹⁴ 4. 1233-38
¹⁵ 4. 1180-7
¹⁶ 3. 59-73
¹⁷ 2.24-36

associated with unchaste Vestal virgins¹⁹ or (for that matter) the abuse of religious ritual in the misuse of *obnuntatio* by Bibulus in 59²⁰ or by Milo in 57²¹. The analysis of romantic love finds its examples from the comic stage rather than the real life around him. The use of apparently legendary or plainly fictitious stories to back up ethical points is odd if the text has the protreptic purpose and the Roman audience which it claims. The reader is advised to reject the behaviour of theatrical types both by the folly they display and by the loaded language in which such behaviour is described, the case being often carried by *reductio ad absurdum*, and yet the contemporary reader does not find his life depicted in the text, for all that he is a character drawn into the didactic process of the poem by explicit remarks such as:

omnia quo pacto fiant quareve creentur
cum bene cognoris elementis reddita quae sint²²

'Do not behave like these (cartoon-figure or mythical) people' will not get the reader very far in his new Epicurean life. The supreme Epicurean moral behaviour is, we are told, friendship, and yet there are very few hints here to that effect²³. Further problems arise when one examines the adversaries whom the poem addresses; one chief target

¹⁸ 1. 80-101

¹⁹ a practice which went on until at least 89 AD (Pliny 4.11) and had been famously performed in 114 BC when two Greeks and two Gauls were executed in the Forum Boarium - a trial which went on into 113 and caused a good deal of publicity (see e.g. Cicero *Brutus* 159, *de Inventione* 1.43, Plutarch *Roman Questions* 83, Dio Cassius frag. 87.5 (Boissier).

²⁰ Suetonius *Divus Julius* 20

²¹ Cicero *ad Atticum* 4.3.4

²² 6. 533-4

of Epicurean polemic was the Stoics, and yet this missionary text fails totally to mention them by name or counter their arguments²⁴. Instead of this we read abundant criticism of the views of the presocratics - philosophers whose ideas had been superseded long since and who found no followers in Rome of the time. This last is less of a problem on the ethical side - the criticisms of the presocratics are for their views on the nature of matter rather than the life of man - but the question of the poet's attitude towards the ethical views of the Stoics remains a curious vacuum.

This line of questioning is not particularly new. Kenney, for instance, begins by endorsing the ethical poverty of the poem:

'Thus the physical doctrines, though they are fundamental and though the exposition of them occupies most of the poem, are in the design of Lucretius' great enterprise functionally subservient to its main end: the scientific argument provides the premiss for the destructive argument which in turn provides the premiss for the final positive ethical conclusions - the statements about how men ought to live. But those final conclusions are not drawn, the statements are not made: the last link in the chain of argument Lucretius takes as read or leaves for others to provide. Thus, though the argument often takes a particular Epicurean ethical position for granted, there is very little in the poem that may be called ethical doctrine.'²⁵

²³ 1. 140-5; 3. 83; 5. 1019-20; friendship was the subject of books 8 and 9 of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (see Price (1989) 103-61)

²⁴ on this see Furley (1966)

²⁵ Kenney (1971) 9-10

He then, however, tries to rescue the poet from these criticisms: he believes that it can be 'proved unequivocally' that the poem 'had not received its final revision at the poet's death'²⁶ which allows the poet endless scope to have wanted to say more about whatever we are missing in his text. Presumably he does not simply mean that book 6 is unfinished²⁷ but that the poet would have inserted ethical sections in the existing poem. He then, however, asserts the contrary that the poet would not have wanted such ethical disquisitions anyway, as (Kenney asserts) ethics just would not have made good poetry:

'Is a metrical account of Epicurean ethics (which were fundamentally very simple) imaginable? Poetry, especially poetry such as Lucretius', cannot thrive upon an unmixed diet of abstractions; it must have its roots in and be nourished by bodily images and concrete associations.'²⁸

This line of reasoning simply will not do. Ethical teaching can use bodily images and concrete associations if the author so chooses – the language of 2.1-61 for instance is highly specific. In the second place, Epicurean ethics can be made comprehensible and practical but are not 'fundamentally simple' as Kenney asserts. If the master's intuition that pleasure is the ultimate good, for instance, is to be accepted it would

²⁶ Kenney (1971) 13

²⁷ see e.g. Clay (1983) 251 ('The end of book 6 is the end Lucretius intended for the *de Rerum Natura*'), Gale (1994) 224 ('Few critics would now deny that Lucretius intended his poem to end as it does in our texts.')

²⁸ Kenney (1971) 10

require a great deal of discussion²⁹, and the concept of personal pleasure as good leaves the system open to a great deal of questioning on the nature of justice towards others, all of which is more urgent and potentially more interesting to a Roman than the finer points of waterspouts. Epicurus had an ethical theory which embraced both private and political³⁰ issues, but which could not, *pace* Kenney, be boiled down into a few words; if the ethical 'conversion' really were the end of the poem, then it is hard to see why the poet did not explore it further.

Kenney's other point - that ethics makes for poor poetry - is also unsound. He states in defence of it that 'Lucilius' well-known fragment on Virtue (1326-38 M.) is as dull as ditchwater, and no writer is in general more lively and pungent.³¹ but ignores the whole history of such ethical poetry from Hesiod onwards and seems almost unaware of the ethical nature of the concluding lines of the very book he is editing. Lucretius was working in a generic tradition which gave him non-ethical predecessors such as Empedocles and Nicander and also more ethically involved writers such as Hesiod; none of which tradition requires him to follow his predecessors slavishly when he in fact more than once claims originality in his blending of Greek and Roman, ethics and science. There is also the example of other writers from the ancient world who did produce great poetry out of discussion of Epicurean ethics: Horace in particular showed that

²⁹ the sort of discussion to be found in e.g. Gosling and Taylor (1982) 365-413

³⁰ see esp. Fowler (1989b)

Epicurean ethics makes for very lively and entertaining poetry - one need only think of the town mouse and the country mouse - which could be presented in either a racy manner (as in the *Satires*³²) or more 'straight' (as in the *Epistles* and *Odes*). The passages of the *DRN* which deal with ethics are not the poor relations when compared to the physics - quite the contrary, in the experience of many readers, who often prefer the 'human interest' of the 'purple passage' to the recondite physics - and if there is a reason why the poet does not draw explicitly ethical conclusions, then it will be necessary to find it if this poem is not to collapse in on itself as a failure.

A further line of argument is simply to deny that the text has any 'final' or protreptic purpose at all. It might after all be urged that the primary purpose of the poem is to be a parade of poetic ability and the ethical purpose merely a formal excuse. Just as the *Epistles* of Horace are not real letters and Ovid's *Ars Amatoria* is hardly serious protreptic, so also this poem is mock-didactic rather than the real thing. The didactic tradition has hexameter verse used simply to expound philosophy (Parmenides, Empedocles etc) and also 'metaphrastic' versified accounts of prose treatises where one suspects that the poet had little if any first-hand knowledge of the subject being explained (Nicander of Colophon's *Venomous Reptiles* is usually cited

³¹ Kenney (1971) p. 10 n.3

³² on which see now Freudenberg (1993) chapter 1 on Horace's poetic use of popular philosophical ideas.

as the classic example of this³³). In between these two lies a vast spectrum of poetic and protreptic style, with some of the greatest examples of the genre being constantly revalued for their position: look for example at the figure of Manilius, whose work was ridiculed a generation ago by Housman as 'skilfully versified sums' but whose religious and political philosophy are now being seen as the motive force behind the astronomical lore and who therefore needs to be placed higher up the protreptic scale than had been thought but whose factual side is of less importance than would at first appear. Vergil's *Georgics*, also, is superficially a treatise on farming and yet the poem is of little practical use in the field; its meaning as a text is for that reason elusive and the factual subject matter is now more frequently seen as synecdochic of a far wider world-view³⁴. Lucretius' poem seems to be clearly an attack on the theological view of the world³⁵ and the accompanying superstition surrounding death³⁶ and also a recommendation to the reader to embrace the Epicurean way of life of *ataraxia* and yet it is always possible to read the text as a poetic *tour de force* with no extrinsic ethical force at all.

This would certainly solve the question outright. There is - on this account - very little in the way of ethical advice in the poem because the poet is not really trying to change the way we live at all

³³ 'The poem is ostensibly an aid to those suffering from the bites of noxious animals; but the poet's solicitous professions of concern for his "patients" should fool no-one. His real aim is to astonish the reader with a mixture of highly incongruous basic ingredients, viz. epic language and the technical vocabulary of zoology and clinical medicine.' (Hopkinson (1988) 143)

³⁴ e.g. Lyne (1993) 203

³⁵ found in e.g. the rationalistic account of thunderbolts in 6. 379-422 and the account of the world not being made by the gods in 5. 91-415

but merely imitating the ethical appearance of other didactic epics with a view to demonstrating his poetic ability. His purpose is as 'sincerely' protreptic as Nicander's interest in snakes and should not be taken seriously. Critics of this school would immediately point to the un-Epicurean nature of poetry and how unorthodox the poet was being in writing in verse at all; his choice of verse form is a clear coded message to the reader that the 'teaching' is not to be taken as seriously as the verse of which it is composed. Epicureans were often seen as being hostile to poetry and yet this one wrote an epic poem, complete with invocations of gods whom Epicureans did not usually invoke; but the 'coded message' theory depends on the reader being familiar enough with Epicurean thought to know its views on poetry before he has begun to read the poem which is going to educate him in Epicureanism and thus creates a circular argument.

The hostility of Epicurus to poetry has aroused a good deal of discussion³⁷. From the evidence available, however, there seems nothing to stop us arguing that Epicurus' hostility to poetry was above all an aversion to superstitious stories which inflamed fear and ignorance; that in the right hands such poetic skill could be turned to better effect - why, after all, should the devil have all the best tunes? Traditional *paideia* was rejected, but future *paideia* might take a very different shape; there was nothing intrinsically bad in the poetry itself, it was simply the nonsense which it propounded which annoyed him - a

³⁶ which occupies most of book 3

³⁷ e.g. Gale (1993) 14-18, Godwin (1994) 244-6, Waszink, Classen.

point proven by Epicurus' ready agreement that 'it is reasonable to cite even poets, sophists and orators, so long as they (say something) that admits of a correct application'³⁸. Content, then, rather than form, was the focus of attention. There is no barrier to an Epicurean poet rehabilitating the form of ancient *paideia* to create a new *paideia* which will replace it; and Lucretius - it might be argued - does exactly that.

The prologue remains a problem, of course. Epicurus was strict in his rejection of the superstition which believed that the gods hear us and can affect our lives, and the poet faithfully tells us on several occasions³⁹ that the gods do not hear us – and yet he begins his poem with an extended hymn to Venus complete with a request for her help:

te sociam studeo scribendis versibus esse⁴⁰

although his theological views explicitly deny any possibility of the gods taking any part in human affairs. Gale's theory that 'having once offered the reader the honeyed cup of the proem, L. proceeds to substitute the medicine of Epicurean philosophy'⁴¹ is attractive (but inevitably a speculation) and lends some weight to the theory of the Epicurean attitude to poetry being advanced here. The sage can not only steal the devil's tunes in composing traditional poetry: he can even

³⁸ Fragment of *On nature* 14 col. 29.18-22 Vogliano, cited and translated Gale (1994) 16 n.42

³⁹ 1. 44-49, 150-158; 2. 167-183, 646-51, 1090-1104; 4. 1233-1239; 5. 76-90, 110-234, 1194-1240, 6; 58-89, 379-422

⁴⁰ 1.24

dance with the devil and get away with it in traditional poetic costume, so long as the illusion is dispelled by the philosophy, rather as metonymic mythological terms are perfectly allowable as long as the reader does not believe in the superstitions lurking behind them.⁴² The poet's use of poetic mythology is provocative and ironic, just as is his invocation of the Muse Calliope in book 6⁴³. There are other things going on in the prologue, and it is a text to which we will return later; it is not fatal to the protreptic purpose of the poem. Certainly the apparent hostility of Epicurus towards poetic composition in general does not warrant a sweeping dismissal of this poem as a protreptic text.

We are a long way, then, from the extreme position of De Lacy's judgement that all that we know of Epicurus' hostility to art and poetry makes Lucretius seem more and more 'outside the tradition of Epicureanism'⁴⁴. Such theorists would have to be arguing that the poet either did not know about the Epicurean hostility to poetry - in which case he cannot have had a very thorough education in the philosophy he propounds - or that he did not care about it. This is also to ignore the other Epicureans (such as Philodemus) who wrote poetry with a clear conscience, and also Lucretius' avowed intention to illuminate the truth with the clear light of poetry⁴⁵ rather than to cloud the imagination with awful fears and superstitious stories, a fairly clear

⁴¹ Gale (194) 211

⁴² DRN 2.655-660

⁴³ 6.92-5

⁴⁴ De Lacy (1939) 91

reference to precisely the distinction drawn above. Lucretius successfully uses the language of traditional mythology a good deal in (for instance) his use of the imagery of gigantomachy⁴⁶, but this is for good reasons which we shall examine later.

A more immediate issue is the relative priority of the poetry and the philosophy. If, after all, the poet's ethical aim is paramount, then we should expect it to be stated as such: and it is. The programmatic passage in book 1⁴⁷ is quite unambiguous on the subject and is a key text for this thesis. This is, after all, the text which 'proves' that the ethical purpose of the text is paramount and one which therefore merits more attention than the poet appears to give it.

avia Pieridum peragro loca nullius ante
trita solo. iuvat integros accedere fontis
atque haurire, iuvatque novos decerpere flores
insignemque meo capiti petere inde coronam
unde prius nulli velarint tempora Musae: 930
primum quod magnis doceo de rebus et artis
religionum animum nodis exsolvere pergo,
deinde quod obscura de re tam lucida pango
carmina musaeo contingens cuncta lepore.
id quoque enim non ab nulla ratione videtur; 935
nam veluti pueris absinthia taetra medentes
cum dare conantur, prius oras pocula circum
contingunt mellis dulci flavoque liquore,
ut puerorum aetas improvida ludificetur
labrorum tenuis, interea perpotet amarum 940
absinthii laticem deceptaque non capiatur,
sed potius tali pacto recreata valescat,
sic ego nunc, quoniam haec ratio plerumque videtur
tristior esse quibus non est tractata, retroque

⁴⁵ cf 6. 39-42
⁴⁶ Hardie (1986) 209-213, Gale (1993) 43-5
⁴⁷ 1. 921-50 = 4. 1-25

volgus abhorret ab hac, volui tibi suaviloquenti 945
 carmine Pierio rationem exponere nostram
 et quasi musaeo dulci contingere melle
 si tibi forte animum tali ratione tenere
 versibus in nostris possem, dum percipis omnem
 naturam rerum ac persentis utilitatem. 950

Notice the purpose of freeing the mind from religious superstition (931-2) and then the therapeutic imagery of the poet as doctor healing the sick child of a patient (936-42). The ethical purpose - the medicine - is the end, the poetry is the means to that end.

This has occasioned surprise. The *de rerum natura* has been called 'the greatest poem in Latin'⁴⁸, and yet the poetry itself, Lucretius himself suggests⁴⁹, is merely the honey on the cup, the cosmetic dressing to render dull science more palatable to the audience. The poem's ostensible purpose to convert the reader appears to take precedence in the poet's objectives over the desire to write poetry for its own sake, a tension which has prompted critical debate ever since about whether Lucretius is 'really' a philosopher or a poet⁵⁰, a metaphrast looking sincere or a philosopher with a knack for verse. Those who regard Epicurus as steadfastly opposed to poetry might even claim that Lucretius is being apologetic to the memory of his master for having composed a poem rather than prose treatises as Epicurus did:

⁴⁸ West (1969) p. vii

⁴⁹ l. 921-950, = 4.1-25

⁵⁰ see e.g. Gale (1994) 1-2, Costa (1984) pp. xiii-xvii

'Lucretius is so eager to justify his un-Epicurean use of verse, playing down the role of his poetry by contrast with the healing power of Epicurean philosophy, that he perhaps underestimates his own genius'⁵¹.

There are traces of contempt for some forms of poetry: Lucretius is scathing - on good Epicurean grounds - about the poetic language of his predecessor Heraclitus, whose work he describes as follows:

Heraclitus init quorum dux proelia primus,
clarus ob obscuram linguam magis inter inanis
quamde gravis inter Graios qui vera requirunt.
omnia enim stolidi magis admirantur amantque
inversis quae sub verbis latitantia cernunt,
veraue constituunt quae belle tangere possunt
auris et lepido quae sunt fucata sonore.⁵²

This sounds inconsistent on the part of the poet whose own work is to be filled with divine *lepos*⁵³ and the sneer at words which *belle tangere possunt/ auris* again is odd from the poet who claims to have the intention to

quasi musaeo dulci contingere melle⁵⁴

but is obviously the sentiment of one whose master Epicurus had advocated *σαφής* above all else and whose philosophy rejected the obscure language of his predecessors. Lucretius aspires to a poetic language which will sweeten but not obfuscate his message.

A further problem has been perceived in the ending of the poem. The purpose of the poetry is, according to the poet, to give the

⁵¹ Gale (1994) 2.

⁵² 1. 638-644

⁵³ 1.28

reader the honey he needs to enjoy the learning; and yet the ending of the poem appears to be a false closure⁵⁵ as the text breaks off in the middle of the picture of the Athenian plague, leaving the reader with anything but a honeyed taste in the mouth. The closure of any work of literature can be looked towards for a clue not only as to the bounds of the enterprise but also its purpose, its 'finality'⁵⁶, and the ending of this poem is apparently eloquent in its unhoneyed emptiness. This again is an interesting dilemma, and answers to it will illuminate the poet's method and the true nature of this Epicurean poetry. It does not in itself render the ethical side of the poem worthless; but it does show that the ethical conclusion towards which the poet is arguing will be no simple panacea or trite happy ending. The ending of the poem shows us the pain of the plague and leaves us with a vision of human society emotionally, physically and morally bleak. This is not made up by the poet solely to depress the reader - it comes with the pedigree of Thucydides attesting its veracity - but the decision to put it in at all and to end the text with it is clearly significant and in need of an answer later on.

The real Epicurean is one who enjoys poetic shows. The wise man will enjoy dramatic shows more than the next man⁵⁷, and Plutarch is probably right to claim that there is a contradiction here: if poetry is bad for us but pleasure is the good, and if the wise man will

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4. 22

55

see D.P. Fowler, (1989) 75-122

56

on this whole topic see Fowler 1989a

57

D.L. 10.120

derive more pleasure from theatre than he will derive both good and bad at once. Gale is, however, right that the wise man will 'be immune to the disturbing influences of *muthoi* and thus derive a 'purer' pleasure from such events'⁵⁸ but this does imply that he will be able to enjoy the pleasure (good) without suffering the bad (superstition) because he knows that it is only fiction after all. Poetry, in other words, is only bad if people believe it to be true; and so it will be quite safe to send the reader of the DRN into the theatre. It will also be quite permissible for the Roman reader to pick up the poetry of Lucretius if he is educated in the truth: otherwise the analogy with the doctor and the child breaks down completely. If, after all, the child were told that the cup contained bitter wormwood behind the honey, then he would not drink it; and yet here the reader is being told that the poetic honey is disguising that which is *tristior*. The poet thus gives the game away and breaks the illusion - unless the illusion needed to be broken for the full effect to be worked. Unless, that is, the wise man needs to know that poetry is mendacious.

The key text on the subject is to the effect that the Epicurean wise man may be a good interpreter of poetry - which perhaps means he can see its mendacity - but he will not write it himself:

μόνον τε τὸν σοφὸν ὀρθῶς ἂν περὶ τε μουσικῆς καὶ ποιητικῆς διαλέξεσθαι. ποιήματα τε ἐνεργεία οὐκ ἂν ποιῆσαι.⁵⁹

Quite apart from the textual difficulties here⁶⁰, the emphasis on *ἐνεργεία* is surely significant; the wise man may well compose poetry,

⁵⁸ Gale (1994) 15

but he will not work at it to the detriment of his contentment⁶¹. This does not sit with the total dedication of a Lucretius:

sed tua me virtus tamen et sperata voluptas
suavis amicitiae quemvis efferre laborem
suadet, et inducit noctes vigilare serenas
quaerentem dictis quibus et quo carmine demum
clara tuae possim praepandere lumina menti
res quibus occultas penitus convisere possis⁶²

but then that passage is very much in the mould of Diogenes Laertius 10.37, where we read Epicurus claiming the same sort of total dedication to the subject which however grants *ataraxia*, peace of mind and contentment:

παρεγγυῶν τὸ συνεχὲς ἐνέργημα ἐν φυσιολογία καὶ
τοιούτῳ μάλιστα ἐγγαληνίζων τῷ βίῳ

Again, the nice metaphor of *ἐγγαληνίζων* perfectly expresses the argument of this section. Epicurus has no objection to metaphor itself, or else he would not use such a word; he clearly savours the literary pleasure of the mode of expression and also the literary and philosophical effort which goes into it, producing the sort of provocative paradox - labour producing rest, effort creating calm - which Lucretius uses in abundance.

To sum up so far; the ethical and protreptic message of the poem is paramount - the poet claims that the poetry is no more than the honey to sweeten the pill - but the wise man needs educating in the

59 Diogenes Laertius 10.120
60 the ms reading *ἐνεργεῖν* is surely wrong
61 'the wise person does not make a practice of composing poetry' Asmis (1995) 32
62 1. 140-145

truth and thus to be enabled to see through the charming veil of poetry to the reality which it expresses.

There is thus no room at all for the notion that the ethical 'message' is simply an excuse to bring the poem into line with other didactic epics, a literary showpiece of generic composition. All didactic poets parade knowledge, be it venomous reptiles or the constellations, and there is usually a covering suggestion that the knowledge will be useful (e.g. to the farmer or mariner) as well as interesting to the curious. The 'use' of this poem is impressive: nothing less than human happiness and freedom from fear, both secured by a knowledge of the truth of the entire universe. We are left with the problem with which we began: the attention to ethics in the poem is short and unsatisfactory for an ambition so massive, and yet the text clearly asserts an ethical protreptic purpose. This thesis attempts to solve this problem by arguing that the poem does have an ethical stance which offers us a way of living which could be called 'aesthetic' and which (in so doing) solves the long-standing critical dichotomy of poet and philosopher in a new way which does justice both to the poetry and to the philosophy.

CHAPTER TWO

THE ETHICS OF PERCEPTION - SEEING THE GOOD

The first chapter of this thesis examined the disparity between the ethical claims of the poem and the paucity of ethical advice delivered in the text. Lucretius, it has been suggested, does not address the specific ethical questions of everyday Roman life which would equip his newly converted reader to put the master's precepts into practice. This chapter will now examine the nature of the ethical advice which the poet does give the reader and assess its consistency and suitability for the purpose.

The purpose of ethics was usually in the ancient world defined as answering the question 'How should men live?', to identify and seek what is the good - usually defined as happiness and well-being for human beings as they engage in societal living - and the general purpose of all such ethical writing was to define the term 'good' in action¹. The language and scope of such ethical enquiries adopted a 'medical' and therapeutic tone in places² and Lucretius adopts the stance of the doctor on many occasions.³

The ethics of the poem bears this out further. The poet appears to assume, for instance, that

¹ cf. e.g. Rowe (1976), 9: 'For [Greek philosophers] the aims of moral philosophy were at all times essentially practical in nature. Its chief concern was not with the theoretical analysis of the nature of moral discourse, but with the establishment and the justification of particular systems of conduct.'

² 'Throughout the late fifth and early fourth centuries.. Greek thinkers and writers were finding it increasingly easy to think of ethical/political argument as similar to medicine and to look to it for 'healing' when confronted with seemingly intractable psychological afflictions.' (Nussbaum (1994) 52

pleasure is the good

pleasure is the removal of pain

therefore removal of pain is the good

and so his principal target in this objective was to remove the unnecessary mental and physical pains of fear and mental and physical suffering; fear of the gods interfering in the world by sending plagues or thunderbolts⁴, fear of torments after death⁵, and pain caused by the misguided seeking of pleasure. If pain is removed, then, Lucretius implies, happiness will inevitably follow. There is nothing in the universe which is not material and atomic, and so all propositions - even ethical and moral normative statements - rely on sense-perception for factual verification and can be demonstrated by reference to the natural sciences. The priority of sense-perception in ethical (as in all other) judgement is going to be crucial in the argument and will be discussed in some detail. The first and most obvious demonstration of this priority of sense-experience is the frequent use of words denoting sight and light in the poem. Time and again the reader is told that he will *see* the truth, for example:

unde anima atque animi constet natura *videndum*⁶.

or again:

quas ob res ubi *viderimus* nil posse creari⁷

³ most obviously 1. 935-50 = 4.10-25

⁴ 6. 379-422 on thunderbolts: the plague is explained in wholly naturalistic terms at 6. 1090-1286

⁵ 3. 31-58

⁶ 1. 131

⁷ 1. 155

and he is also promised that apparently contradictory evidence (e.g. the seeing of ghosts 'proving' that we can live after death) will in turn be explained. He does not deny that the sense-experience itself is valid, but rather asserts that our interpretation of the sense-data is faulty.

In doing this, Lucretius differs *toto caelo* from Plato and the whole metaphysical tradition. For Plato, reality cannot be apprehended by the senses but only by reason: higher good qualities such as justice, beauty and so on do exist as perfect Forms but are not accessible to the senses, and even where we recognise these qualities in the world of sense it is not that we have learned from sense-experience to perceive them but that we recognise them from our pre-natal knowledge of the perfect Forms. True knowledge is of the Forms, sense-experience being only ever imperfect opinion, as expounded in *Theaetetus* (151e). For Lucretius, true knowledge is of the atoms - which are themselves as immutable and eternal as Plato's Forms - and such knowledge comes through the senses. Where the obvious unreliability of the senses leads Plato to posit that they are the imperfect transmitters of perfect truth and must be replaced by reason as the discoverer of reality, Lucretius undaunted presses the anti-Sceptical case to the point where he claims that we can perceive the faults in our own perception and that his explanatory theories (based on perception) can account for the flaws in perception itself⁸.

What we call goodness is in fact a state of personal happiness guided and secured by the perception of the limits and nature of pleasure, katastematic rather than kinetic. Above all, it is the task of

the ethical philosopher to give the sort of scientific knowledge which will produce the truth about the world; this will promote right thinking and reduce ignorance and will consequently maximise happiness and banish empty fears. People all seek the same thing - pleasure - but the wicked and the foolish are misguided in their interpretation of what is good for them, victims of an inability to see the world aright. Goodness and happiness can only be gained by living the good life according to our atomic bodily nature, and it is therefore the task of the atomist ethical philosopher to expound the nature of things and let the ethics be derived from that, as we argued earlier. This is already leading us towards the idea that ethics can be aesthetic - if all ethical judgements rest on the perception (*aisthesis*) of the world, then the judgements will be to that extent at least aesthetic ones as well as moral assertions. We must first examine the major sections of the poem where Lucretius explicitly makes judgements of a moral, social and political nature and see how this primacy of right perception is at all times the dominant ethical imperative.

THE FEAR OF DEATH

The analysis of the fear of death as a cause of misery and vice in book 3 is a most revealing passage to illustrate the poet's ethical stance:

et metus ille foras praeceps Acheruntis agendus
 funditus humanam qui vitam turbat ab imo,
 omnia suffundens mortis nigrore, neque ullam
 esse voluptatem liquidam puramque relinquit. 40
 nam quod saepe homines morbos magis esse timendos
 infamemque ferunt vitam quam Tartara leti
 et se scire animi naturam sanguinis esse
 aut etiam venti, si fert ita forte voluntas,
 nec prorsum quicquam nostrae rationis egere, 45
 hinc licet advertas animum magis omnia laudis
 iactari causa quam quod res ipsa probetur:
 extorres idem patria longeque fugati
 conspectu ex hominum, foedati crimine turpi,
 omnibus aerumnis adfecti denique vivunt, 50
 et quocumque tamen miseri venere parentant
 et nigras mactant pecudes et manibu' divis
 inferias mittunt multoque in rebus acerbis
 acrius advertunt animos ad religionem.
 quo magis in dubiis hominem spectare periclis 55
 convenit adversisque in rebus noscere qui sit;
 nam verae voces tum demum pectore ab imo
 eliciuntur et eripitur persona, manet res.
 denique avarities et honorum caeca cupido,
 quae miseros homines cogunt transcendere fines 60
 iuris et interdum socios scelerum atque ministros
 noctes atque dies niti praestante labore
 ad summas emergere opes, haec vulnera vitae
 non minimam partem mortis formidine aluntur.
 turpis enim ferme contemptus et acris egestas 65
 semota ab dulci vita stabilique videtur
 et quasi iam leti portas cunctarier ante;
 unde homines dum se falso terrore coacti
 effugisse volunt longe longeque remosse,
 sanguine civili rem conflant divitiasque 70
 conduplicant avidi, caedem caede accumulantes,
 crudeles gaudent in tristi funere fratris
 et consanguineum mensas odere timentque.
 consimili ratione ab eodem saepe timore
 macerat invidia ante oculos illum esse potentem 75
 illum aspectari, claro qui incedit honore,
 ipsi se in tenebris volvi caenoque queruntur.
 intereunt partim statuarum et nominis ergo.
 et saepe usque adeo, mortis formidine, vitae
 percipit humanos odium lucisque videndae 80
 ut sibi consciscant maerenti pectore letum
 obliti fontem curarum hunc esse timorem:
 hunc vexare pudorem, hunc vincula amicitiai
 rumpere et in summa pietatem evertere suadet;
 nam iam saepe homines patriam carosque parentis
 prodiderunt, vitare Acherusia templa petentes.

The passage has puzzled editors and has therefore not generally been given the treatment it deserves: 'unter allen die philosophische Ethik betreffenden Aussagen des Lukrez gibt es kaum eine, die in den Kommentaren so wenig eine sichere, wirklich voll befriedigende Beurteilung gefunden hat wie die Herleitung der als typisch für sein Zeitalter angesehenen Exzesse von Gewinnsucht und Machtstreben aus der Todesfurcht' declares Schmid⁹. Bailey comments on the 'vehemence and strangeness'¹⁰ of the poet's treatment of the fear of death and its moral consequences, but the passage has many features which are fully in accordance with the poet's style. There is firstly the satirical removing of the mask from the boastful men who claim not to fear death; the man who claims he understands death and would sooner die than suffer disease or disgrace is still to be found dragging out his life in shame elsewhere and carrying out superstitious rituals which show his ignorance of the truth. This is mockery of human pretensions and encouragement to the reader to disown such behaviour as being dishonest to the truth and to others.

There is then far more serious criticism and some original insight on the part of the poet: the fear of death is in no small measure responsible for the immoral behaviour of many people. This notion is not to be found in Epicurus himself: Bailey and Kenney point towards K.Δ. 6 and 7 where Epicurus speaks of the 'secure life' (ἀσφάλεια-

⁹ Schmid (1978) 137

¹⁰ Bailey (1947) ii 993

stabilis vita 66) but the Greek will not extend as far as Lucretius' conclusions and it appears to be the poet's own idea which inspires this passage. It is important to unpack exactly what the poet is saying here: he is not producing the stock picture of black *cura* stalking the rich and famous and cutting them down to mortal size, such as we find in (say) Horace *Odes* 3.1.40; nor is he examining the contrast between the rich man ruthlessly pursuing wealth at home in the face of certain death with its inescapable eternal abode as we find in Horace *Odes* 2.18. He is claiming that the rich and ambitious pursue their desires not in *despite* of the fear of death but *because* of it and that therefore they are apparently seeking life (as in the 'good things of life') but actually looking towards death, if only they knew it. The poet explains this almost syllogistically:

men see poverty and disgrace as being next door to death,
 they wish to flee death
 therefore they flee disgrace and poverty.

They do this by seeking wealth by unscrupulous means where they can and begrudging such status in others in bitter envy where they cannot, ambition and envy being for them two sides of the same coin. The logic is poor: the shoring up of 'security' through money and fame is more probably an attempt to enjoy what life we have left rather than a terror of its ending, and the most that could be said for the poet's theory in this form is that such pleasures may function as a distraction from the awful truth of our eventual demise. It would have been better perhaps for the poet to have urged that, since pleasure cannot be

increased once the pain of want has been satisfied, there is no point in trying to squeeze more pleasures into a limited lifespan, linking the passage with the concept of limited desires and ἀπληστία¹¹. This sort of critique of the greedy lifestyle can be found elsewhere¹² and occurs again later in book 3¹³, and is echoed in a passage of Porphyry where Epicurus is said to have linked the insatiable desire for life, wealth and property with 'fearing the terror associated with death as limitless' (τὸ κατὰ τὸν θάνατον δεινὸν ὡς ἀπέραντον)¹⁴; it would have been easy and philosophically advantageous for the poet to adduce such criticisms here, especially as he puts similar arguments into the mouth of Nature against the old man reluctant to leave life's banquet even though his time is up:

'aufer abhinc lacrimas, baratre, et compesce querellas!
omnia perfunctus vitae praemia marces;
sed quia semper aves quod abest, praesentia temnis,
imperfecta tibi elapsast ingrataque vita,
et nec opinanti mors ad caput adstitit ante
quam satur ac plenus possis discedere rerum'¹⁵

Time and again the reader is reminded of the limitations of nature and human nature, and it is only the fool who does not realise that pleasure and happiness are no less attainable now just because life is finite; and death cannot be unpleasant because there will be no sensation at all. Instead of this reasoning here, however, we have a passage of social

¹¹ cf. Schmid (1978), Segal (1990) 15

¹² 2. 14-61

¹³ the Danaids at 3. 1003-1010, recalling Plato *Gorgias* 493d5-495b9

¹⁴ Porphyry Frag. 458 Usener, cited by Segal (1990) 16

¹⁵ 3. 954-960

and political comment whose direction is oblique and in need of explanation and whose logical structure is faulty.

The two worlds of the successful and the unsuccessful, the ones in the bright light¹⁶ of fame (*claro*), the others in the darkness (*tenebris*), are as sharply contrasted as the living and the dead:

illum esse potentem,
illum aspectari, claro qui incedit honore,
ipsi se in tenebris volvi caenoque queruntur.¹⁷

The fear of death shatters *pudor*, *amicitia*, *pietas*; loyalty to the fatherland (*patriam*) and parents is a lamented casualty of the fear of death, as is the bond of *amicitia*. In extreme cases, the enjoyment of life is so sickened by the moral and psychological malaise of the fear of death that suicide is committed - a neat ironic touch of the poet's¹⁸ whereby the fear of death actually produces its own disaster and thus 'proves' itself in a manner close to Cicero's account:

ut enim mortis metu omnis quietae vitae status perturbatur, et ut succumbere doloribus eosque humili animo inbecilloque ferre miserum est, ob eamque debilitatem animi multi parentes, multi amicos, non nulli patriam, plerique autem se ipsos penitus perdiderunt...¹⁹

This is not merely satire, of course; the moral terms are loaded with value-judgements. No discussion of Lucretius as an ethical writer should fail to notice the implicit values in such terms as *pudor*, *pietas*, *amicitia*. These last two in particular had a special meaning for the Roman of the late Republic, meaning far more than

¹⁶ visual imagery once again

¹⁷ 3. 75-7

¹⁸ not original to him: cf. Democritus B203 DK

¹⁹ *de finibus* 1.15.49

'duty' and 'friendship' and extending into the world of political alliance²⁰ as in Lyne's useful analysis of the use of such terms in Catullus:

The Roman social code was deeply felt and, as a rule, elaborately practised. Virtually every page of the correspondence of Cicero...attests both code and terminology...*Fides* ('fidelity', 'integrity') was, or should be, the foundation of all actions and relationships; one conducted oneself in accordance with *pietas* ('sense of loyalty', 'conscientiousness'). One had a profound sense of *officium* ('service', 'dutifulness'); one was pleased, indeed compelled, to find and to display *gratia* ('favour'). Embracing and applying all these and other ideas was the extensive, sometimes very formal relationship connoted by *amicitia*: a complex and profound 'friendship' implying at best mutual obligation, mutual affection and mutual pleasure. *Amicitia* was, among the Roman aristocracy, the essence of any proper relationship, private or public, business or pleasure....this language, the highly charged language of Roman aristocratic fellowship...²¹

The implications for Lucretius' text are considerable. The poet not only uses the terms of political activity, he actually appears committed to the morals behind the political machine even though the Epicurean is opposed to the engaging of the citizen in politics. Why would he decry the breaking of the bonds of *amicitia*, if he did not feel that such *amicitia* was a good thing? Is *pudor* any more than mere

²⁰ see e.g. Brunt (1965) and see the important discussion of the theory of L's seeking of Memmius' patronage in Clay (1983) 215, a theory which Clay rightly dismisses as 'literary fiction'.

²¹ Lyne (1980) 24-5

maintenance of status and as such is it worth lamenting when it is lost? *Pietas* also might be seen as merely duty towards others with little gain for oneself. Is the poet therefore consistently opposed to political activity, or just to the seeking of glory and power? Are these distinguishable goals? Fowler, in an important article²², has discussed the present passage and drawn attention to the parallels which obtain between it and the near-contemporary Sallust, as well as adducing other parallels such as Hesiod *Works and Days* 176-201²³ - but he has not gone far enough in his analysis of the incoherences of the text as an anti-political tract.

The language used is that of political invective and hyperbole²⁴ and the target is, to begin with, the politically ambitious: who else would find themselves exiled (*extorres patria...foedati crimine turpi* 49-50)? The poet's quarry then becomes less obviously political - after all, the struggle to climb *ad summas opes* could describe the quest for wealth²⁵ just as surely as political power, the greed of an *eques* as surely as the ambition of a senator - especially when the poet shortly afterwards talks of the motive force being fear of *acris egestas* which can only mean poverty. The phrase *avarities et honorum caeca cupido* (59) joins the twin goals of wealth and power neatly together, to be glossed later as *haec vulnera vitae* (63), that is, aspects of life which effectively disable the human being from enjoying it to the full although

²² Fowler (1989b)

²³ Fowler (1989b) 137 n. 71

²⁴ examples quoted in Fowler (1989b) 137-9 + nn.

²⁵ see OLD s.v. 'ops' 4a

they think that they are climbing to the pinnacle of power. The seeking after wealth and power forces men to cross the boundaries of the law and to struggle night and day towards *opes*. The results of such behaviour are delight in death - even that of a brother - and the mistrust of hospitality; thus the fear of one's own death brings about callous disregard for the deaths of others and mistrust of even dinner-party hosts²⁶.

What is essential to this thesis is to see Lucretius' use of the language of sight and delusion to describe his targets. These men are seeking what they believe will make them happy and successful; none of which the poet can disapprove of in itself. Their mistake, however, is to misinterpret the evidence available by thinking that the *res* they want require murder for their acquisition. Notice how the poet criticises their blindness (*caeca cupido* 59) and how their disgrace and poverty is a matter of seeming so (*videtur*) to others and is made into a cartoon-like simile whose obvious unreality is a form of mockery (*quasi iam leti ante.. portas* 67). Men are driven by *falso terrore* (68), their empty wistful dreams being well emphasised in the repeated *longe longeque* (69). Their actions are then an inflation of their ideas into a multiplicity of action, the proliferation well brought out by the verbs *conflant... conduplicant* and the verbal repetition *caedem caede* to show verbally the repeated murders. The verbs are interesting here: *conflo* has the meanings of 'running up a debt'²⁷ as well as 'hatching a

²⁶ cf. 5. 1010

²⁷ Sallust *Cat* 14.2, 24.3, OLD s.v. 'conflo' 7b

conspiracy'²⁸, and also has the sense of 'inventing a lie'²⁹; thus the poet can in a single word suggest impecunious political chicanery which is based on a lie. The notion of 'reduplication' in the word *conduplicant* also carries with it the sense of illusion as at 4. 447-452. The moral confusion is well brought out by the oxymoronic words *gaudent in tristi* (72) just as there is something bizarre in 'hating and fearing' the tables of people who are *consanguineum* - the word neatly picking up the twin associations of joined by blood and kin but also *sanguine civili* from 70. The primary emotion in the next paragraph is *invidia* - another false form of *videre* - and just in case we have not noticed the visual nature of the feelings being mocked the poet adds *ante oculos*. The ambitious man is looking with mistaken envy at a man who is himself being looked upon (*aspectari*) with public honour (*claro...honore*), a passage well suggesting the hall-of-mirrors which is Roman politics in which each man is nervously eying the opposition. The complaint of the failed politician is again obviously false, couched in a revealing metaphor: *ipsi se in tenebris volvi caenoque queruntur* (77) where the prevailing theme of light and darkness (truth and falsehood) is joined to a familiar political cliché *caeno*³⁰ in (again) a piece of obvious unreality and hyperbolic self-pity - note the inflated conceit of *volvi* put into the mouth of a whining fool. The following line neatly sums up their 'sacrifice' as all being for the sake of *statuarum et nominis* (78), 'an

²⁸ Cicero *de Orat.* 2.124, OLD s.v. 'conflo' 3b

²⁹ Cicero *Q. Rosc.* 48, OLD s.v. 'conflo' 4

³⁰ e.g. Cicero *In Vatinius* 23 *fuerisque non tribunus plebis, sed intolerandus ex caeno nescio qui atque ex tenebris tyrannus*; cf *ibid.* 17, Otto (1890) 63

almost Juvenalian phrase³¹ which also neatly encapsulates the argument under discussion: a *nomen* is of course merely a word, a sound with no substance, and hardly worth dying for; whereas a *statua*, while having a great deal more permanence and suggesting the sort of *imagines patrum* on which the Roman nobility prided themselves³², is also a translation of the Greek εἰδωλον which also means for Lucretius *simulacrum*, the insubstantial images being emitted from things all the time. This kind of etymological joke is very much in the poet's manner³³ and adds greatly to the effect here. The final irony is that the fear of death brings it about, anxiety breeding hatred of life and then suicide; once again the poet imports an unnecessary element of 'seeing' here in his gloss of *vitae* as *lucisque videndae* with the ironic point that seeing incorrectly sours the enjoyment of seeing (i.e. living) at all, but that their suicide is a mistake caused by their 'forgetting' (*obliti*) the truth. Knowledge is secured by perception when correctly interpreted, and happiness must be secured by knowledge rather than ignorance. The fool is not wicked but simply deluded, seeing is adequate to correct his folly and illusion is the root of all evil.

These illusions then cause the moral chaos we saw earlier.

Again notice the language used:

hunc vexare pudorem, hunc vincula amicitiai
rumpere et in summa pietatem evertere suadet;
nam iam saepe homines patriam carosque parentes
prodiderunt, vitare Acherusia templa petentes.³⁴

31 Kenney (1971) 86

32 cf. e.g. the words of Marius in Sallust *B.J.* 85

33 cf. e.g. the Phryges/fruges joke at 2.610-13, with West (1969) 105-6

34 3. 83-6

where the verbs in particular are all violent and aggressive: *vexare* is to 'damage, attack, treat roughly, ravage, afflict', only here used of *pudor*³⁵; *vincula rumpere* suggests the breaking of bonds and thus liberation as at Cicero *Verrines* 5.79

si aufugisset, si vincula rupisset

or *in Catilinam* 4.8

adiungit gravem poenam municipiis, si quis eorum vincula ruperit...

although the element of 'liberation' is being subverted here into the atomic notion of shattering the cohesive bonds of *amicitia*, the word *vinculum* having a precise atomic meaning as 'the force which binds the atoms into their *concilia*' as at 6. 355-6:

quae facile insinuantur et insinuata repente
dissolvunt nodos omnis et vincla relaxant.

The violent shattering of the bonds of trust - to liberate the amoral man perhaps from anything which might hamper his progress - thus becomes a simple atomic rupture; we see *amicitia* almost as a *concilium* whose inner atomic coherence has been shattered by folly which derives from inability to see the correct atomic view of the world. The metaphor implicit in *pietatem evertere* is that of 'overturning a statue' or even 'overthrowing a city', strengthened by the qualifying phrase *in summa* whose surface meaning ('in a word') is accompanied by the sense of

³⁵

OLD s.v. 'vexo' 6 shows how infrequently the word is used metaphorically; for the metaphorical use here compare Propertius 3.19.3: ubi contempti rupistis frena pudoris

summus as 'topmost', suggesting that *pietas* is being overthrown from top to bottom as at 5.163

nec verbis vexare et ab imo evertere summa

The crime betrays both fatherland and fathers (*patriam ..parentis*) with the telling emotive epithet *caros*³⁶ used of the parents; all this to avoid the mockingly named *Acherusia templa*, whose very title suggests their unreality and fatuity. There is furthermore a nice double paradox here: the fools are hoping to avoid Acheron but are 'seeking' to do so, recalling the poet's ironic remarks that the fear of death is a looking towards the very thing we wish to avoid, a paradox well evoked in the oxymoronic verbs *vitare...petentes*. Furthermore, the 'avoiding' of Acheron can only be for them a temporary measure as they will one day have to die and then face the terrible superstitious nightmare, whereas the Epicurean can avoid Acheron for ever by discovering that it simply does not exist - he can thus avoid Acheron without having to murder his family to do so.

The poet concludes the passage with a repetition of the telling theme of children contrasted with adults tied to darkness contrasted with light, a *Leitmotif* of the poem³⁷, thus neatly leaving us with the strong sense that perception of the truth is the prerequisite of wisdom and happiness, that the moral evils he adduces are misguided delusion rather than wilful wickedness.

³⁶ surprising perhaps in the text of an Epicurean, in the light of Epicurus' stress on avoiding attachments (*ἀντάφκεια*)

³⁷ 3. 87-93 = 2. 55-61 = 6. 35-41; 3. 91-3 = 1. 146-148

This is where the poet parts company seriously with the other 'moralist' accounts of late Republican vice which are usually compared with him. Sallust for instance lists the sort of vices which we find in Lucretius, but with no hint of there being anything other than sheer wickedness at work in the followers of Catiline:

nam quicumque impudicus adulter ganeo manu ventre pene bona patria laceraverat, quique alienum aes grande conflaverat, quo flagitium aut facinus redimeret, praeterea omnes undique parricidae sacrilegi convicti iudiciis aut pro factis iudicium timentes, ad hoc quos manus atque lingua periurio aut sanguine civili alebat, postremo omnes quos flagitium egestas conscius animus exagitabat, ii Catilinae proximi familiaresque erant.³⁸

There are verbal similarities between the two: *aes alienum conflaverat* reminds us of *rem conflant divitiasque conduplicant* (70), *parricidae* is not a long way from *gaudent in tristi funere fratres* (72), *sanguis civilis* occurs in both (70), the judicial disgrace of *convicti iudiciis* is recalled in the poet's description of the *foedati crimine turpi*; but these similarities only underline the difference in explanation between the moralising Sallust and the psychologically more subtle Lucretius. Similar differences obtain between Lucretius and another contemporary Catullus, who closes poem 64 with a similar catalogue of vices to explain why the gods no longer visit the human race:

sed postquam tellus scelere est imbuta nefando,
iustitiamque omnes cupida de mente fugarunt,
perfudere manus fraterno sanguine fratres,
destitit extinctos natus lugere parentes,
optavit genitor primaevis funera nati,

liber uti nuptae poteretur flore novellae,
 ignaro mater substernens se impia nato
 impia non verita est divos scelerare penates,
 omnia fanda nefanda malo permixta furore
 iustificam nobis mentem avertere deorum.
 quare nec talis dignantur visere coetus,
 nec se contingi patiuntur lumine claro.³⁹

Again there is the stress on judicial corruption (*iustitiam fugarunt*), on fratricide (*fraterno sanguine fratres*), on the betrayal of parents (*destitit..lugere parentes*); but again there is no suggestion that such behaviour is foolish but simply a blanket moral condemnation of unredeemed wickedness.

These judgements of human folly in Lucretius are continued in the lengthy and impressive piece of allegoresis which seeks to re-interpret the myths of the underworld towards the end of the third book as all being 'types' of human folly. The fear of death is no longer at the centre of the poet's attention, except insofar as he is discrediting the myths of punishment after death to reduce the fear of such torments. Again, however, he fails to do what we expect; we would most naturally expect him to argue rationalistically that as sensation ends with death there can be no pain after death, and that such stories are therefore totally to be rejected. Instead he uses the stories themselves as allegories with which to attack other forms of (to him) immoral behaviour, thus killing the two birds of superstition and misbehaviour with the same stone. In all cases the fault is one of not seeing the truth rather than having the wrong desires; thus bearing out in all cases the thesis argued here of the primacy of perception in ethical decisions.

The 'real' Tantalus, for instance, is to be found in life as follows:

sed magis in vita divom metus urget inanis
mortalis, casumque timent quem cuique ferat fors⁴⁰

where the fatuity of the fear of gods is well brought out by the epithet *inanis*. Tityon is not a giant in Tartarus, but rather:

sed Tityos nobis hic est, in amore iacentem
quem volucres lacerant atque exest anxius angor
aut alia quavis scindunt cuppedine curae.⁴¹

torn by the 'birds' of love as he tosses on a bed of anxiety⁴² which is all in the mind⁴³ and the result of the sort of folly he analyses in book 4. As Kenney has pointed out, even the language of this passage is sarcastic and ironic, debunking the lover with his own pretensions drawn from the fashionable Greek love poetry of the time⁴⁴.

More to the point of our present discussion, Sisyphus becomes a frustrated politician:

Sisyphus in vita quoque nobis ante oculos est,
qui petere a populo fasces saevasque secures
imbibit et semper victus tristisque recedit.
nam petere imperium quod inanest nec datur umquam
atque in eo semper durum suffere laborem,
hoc est adverso nixantem trudere monte
saxum quod tamen e summo iam vertice rursum

39 64. 397-408; for further discussion see Godwin (1995) 171-175

40 3. 982-3

41 3. 992-4

42 see on this passage Kenney (1971) 224-5 and Kenney (1970) 44-47

43 see OLD s.v. 'angor' 2 and its cognate adjective *anxius*

44 Kenney (1970) 44-7

volvitur et plani raptim petit aequora campi.⁴⁵

He, like Tantalus, seeks what is *inane* and therefore insubstantial or even threatening (*saevas..secures*); he is prepared to endure *durum laborem* to achieve this just as the fool at the beginning of the book was prepared to *niti praestante labore*⁴⁶. The poet mocks the politician with his own vocabulary: *petere* and *recedit*⁴⁷ are both technical terms of the political scene, *petit* being sarcastically repeated at 1002 of the rock: and the verb *imbibit* is striking here in its sense of gullible open-mouthed drinking in of foolish purposes and thirsting for power as at 6.72 where the notion is mocked of the gods *ut ex ira poenas petere imbibat acres*. The sketch of the politician is obviously hyperbolic: few politicians would enjoy absolutely *no* success, as is stated in the poet's *semper victus...nec datur umquam* - although obviously the mythical context (of endless torment after death) requires an element of interminability - and as with the men who die *statuarum et nominis ergo*⁴⁸ these men are seeking the idle show of *fasces saevasque secures*, the outward appearance of power and its empty show. As with the earlier passage, the modern-day Sisyphus is also taken in by appearances and is ignorant of the reality.

The Danaids represent the type of person who is never satisfied although the means for his satisfaction are freely to hand:

deinde animi ingratam naturam pascere semper

⁴⁵ 3. 995-1002

⁴⁶ 3. 62

⁴⁷ cf. Kenney ad loc, West (1969) 100-102

⁴⁸ 3. 78

atque explere bonis rebus satiareque numquam -
 quod faciunt nobis annorum tempora, circum
 cum redeunt fetusque ferunt variosque lepores,
 nec tamen explemur vitae fructibus umquam -
 hoc, ut opinor, id est, aevo florente puellas
 quod memorant laticem pertusum congerere in vas,
 quod tamen expleri nulla ratione potestur.⁴⁹

This theme of ἀπλησσία continues the ethical doctrine by contrasting the insatiability of the human and the abundance of the goods available; the poet dwells lovingly on the goodness and beauty of the fruits of the seasons, stressing both the eternal recurrence (*redeunt*) and their fecundity (*fetusque ferunt*) and their beauty (*variosque lepores*) in a neat tricolon crescendo which underlines the ingratitude of the human being just as Nature upbraids the old man loth to die at 3. 931-963. Once again, however, the slant is perceptual and aesthetic rather than simply moralistic. It is not that human beings are inherently greedy and selfish, but simply that they do not see what is needed for their happiness, the familiar *parvum quod satis est* as earlier in the poem:

o miseras hominum mentes! o pectora caeca!
 qualibus in tenebris vitae quantisque periculis
 degitur hoc aevi quodcumque est! nonne videre
 nil aliud sibi naturam latrare, nisi utqui
 corpore seiunctus dolor absit, mensque fruatur
 iucundo sensu cura semota metuque?
 ergo corpoream ad naturam pauca videmus
 esse opus omnino, quae demant cumque dolorem,
 delicias quoque uti multas substernere possint⁵⁰;

Here again the poet is stressing the need simply to look at the world and see the plenitude and the beauty of what is freely available to us,

the error is one of perception rather than intent, and the inherent contradiction in human behaviour well evoked by the paradox that we can *explere* but not *satiare*. The insertion of value-judgements such as *varios lepores* indicates that Epicureanism is not going to rob the world of all its colour, but on the contrary will put the wise man in touch with beauty which is there but often unnoticed. Once again, the fault is misinterpretation of evidence rather than wickedness, and the aesthetic perception of the truth is the poet's remedy for it.

The poet ends this section by looking at the pangs of conscience allegorised into the pains of Hades:

Cerberus et Furiae iam vero et lucis egestas
 Tartarus horriferos eructans faucibus aestus -
 qui neque sunt usquam nec possunt esse profecto.
 sed metus in vita poenarum pro male factis
 est insignibus insignis, scelerisque luella -
 carcer et horribilis de saxo iactu' deorsum,
 verbera carnifices robur pix lammina taedae;
 quae tamen etsi absunt, at mens sibi conscia factis
 praemetuens adhibet stimulos torretque flagellis,
 nec videt interea qui terminus esse malorum
 possit nec quae sit poenarum denique finis,
 atque eadem metuit magis haec ne in morte gravescant.
 hic Acherusia fit stultorum denique vita.⁵¹

Here again the perception is all: the guilty man can see the shocking array of punishments applied to the criminal in this life - 'the gruesome inventory of Roman inhumanity' as Kenney calls it⁵² - but (as if this were not bad enough) he goes on to invent similar punishments after

⁵⁰ 2. 14-22

⁵¹ 3. 1011-1023

⁵² Kenney (1971) 230 ad 1014-1017

death which will be even worse (*gravescant*) because they cannot end, thus neatly inverting the usual fear of death as an eternal lack of pleasure into an eternal agony of suffering⁵³. Once again, perception is all: significantly the poet lists *lucis egestas* among the pains of Hades, and the reason for the mental anguish is simply one of inability to see: *nec videt...* This causes the self-inflicted suffering of the frightened man (*mens...adhibet stimulos torretque flagellis*) who has avoided the real punishment but torments his mind with anticipatory fear (*praemetuens*) of what may never happen, not even allowing himself the consolation that he can always release himself from any possibility of punishment by death. In the case of death, then, we see that the poet has taken the Epicurean arguments against the fear of death based on loss of sensation and has developed them at length: he has also used the fear of death to explain features of social and political life of which he disapproves such as greed and ambition; and he has demythologised the tales of Tartarus into allegories of human folly here and now. In all three cases the primacy of aesthetic sense-perception is obvious; such sensation defines living as opposed to dying⁵⁴, such sensation informs our minds of the truth of the world and allows us to make correct moral judgements in conducting our lives, and the types of human folly are all marked out by the inability to see the truth and dismiss the idle fears of death and suffering. The perception of the limits of our pleasure and pain will liberate us from the pain of anxiety

⁵³ cf. e.g. Plutarch *Non posse suaviter vivi secundum Epicurum* 1107A

⁵⁴ *στέρησις δέ ἐστιν αἰσθήσεως ὁ θάνατος* D.L. 10. 124; DRN 3. 830-42

and thus this perception itself becomes a source of pleasure - as pleasure is the removal of pain - and therefore a source of ethical and moral good. At this point the term 'aesthetic' becomes justified in describing the perception of truth which is the reception and recreation of goodness. The negating of the fear of death is thus transformed into a positive force for happiness and moral goodness.

ROMANTIC LOVE

When we come to the diatribe against romantic love, we see the same insistence on the aesthetics of truth over illusion. Lucretius seems to be pessimistic in the extreme about certain forms of romantic love, but the chief attitude which emerges from his attack is again one of folly rather than vice, of illusion and delusion rather than wickedness.

Epicurus was famously ambivalent towards the subject. In one place⁵⁵ he says:

συνουσίαν δέ φασιν ὀνῆσαι μὲν οὐδέποτε, ἀγαπητὸν δὲ εἰ μὴ καὶ ἔβλαψε.

whereas elsewhere⁵⁶ he counts sexual pleasure among the good things of life. The Epicurean ideal was *ataraxia*, and so sexual activity will be good if it promotes this by removing the pain of frustration, but bad if it impairs the overall serenity of the wise man's disposition. The wise man therefore is not to fall in love (*ἐρασθήσεσθαι*) but neither is

⁵⁵ D.L. 10. 118

⁵⁶ D.L. 10. 6

he necessarily to remain celibate, although Epicurus is said to have denied marriage and child-rearing to the wise man⁵⁷. The sane lover is one who takes sexual pleasure when he needs to do so, when its abstention would cause the pain of frustration; the Epicurean lover is likely to be promiscuous:

si non prima novis conturbes vulnera plagis
volgivaque vagus Venere ante recentia cures⁵⁸

and the romantic lover who insists on the one and only (unattainable) sexual partner is depriving himself of pleasure and condemning himself to pain. What distinguishes the sane and the insane in love is again perception of the truth - the truth both about our real bodily needs and also the truth about the objects of our desires: Lucretius well brings out this dichotomy of the *sani* and the *miseri*, the healthy people who use food and sex but are literally under no illusions about either, and the diseased wretched people who do not. The pathetic delusions of the infatuated lover are described as a sore (*ulcus*) and then as madness (*furor*):

ulcus enim vivescit et inveterascit alendo
inque dies gliscit furor atque aerumna gravescit⁵⁹

whereas the quieter charms of the 'homely little woman' are enunciated with approval and the 'habit of love' sounds more like Epicurean friendship⁶⁰. Sexual pleasure fell into the class of pleasures

⁵⁷ D.L. 10. 119 *μηδὲ καὶ γαμήσειν καὶ τεκνοποιήσιν τὸν σοφόν*
⁵⁸ 4. 1070-1071, cf. Horace *Satires* 1.2.116-119
⁵⁹ 4. 1068-9
⁶⁰ 4. 1278-1287: cf Cicero *De Finibus* 1.21.69

which are natural but not necessary and hence are to be satisfied where necessary but not indulged in beyond the body's natural need⁶¹. Once again it is axiomatic that pleasure, once the immediate desire has been satisfied, can only be varied and not increased⁶², especially if we are considering this sort of kinetic pleasure which only arises from mechanical causes and thus is simply a response to an involuntary stimulus. The sexual urge is inborn in us, to be awakened when we enter the choppy tides of adolescence⁶³: perception is the result of effluences beyond our control, and hunger, sleep and dreams are all explicable in similarly mechanistic atomic terms⁶⁴. The creation and emission of sperm is thus natural; what is unnatural and unnecessary is the retention of sperm as practised by the romantic lover for whom no other woman will do, whose sheer frustration causes him to idealise the beloved and project his fantasies onto her: the locked-out serenader would flee if he were actually admitted and his illusions about the girl were rudely shattered⁶⁵. Marriage is assumed⁶⁶ and even recommended with a wife who is:

morigerisque modis et munde corpore culto⁶⁷

whereas the romantic lover is doomed to frustration as his obsessive attachment to one girl will limit his chances of obtaining sexual

⁶¹ D.L. 10. 127: Cicero *de Finibus* 1. 45

⁶² *Letter to Menoeceus* 130-131, *Kuriat Doxai* 3, 18, Gosling and Taylor 348

⁶³ 4. 1030

⁶⁴ Aristotle (*de motu animalium* 703b5ff) discusses the movement of the penis along with sleeping and waking and breathing as movements over which we have no control: see Furley (1967) 221-2

⁶⁵ 4. 1177-84

⁶⁶ 4. 1277

⁶⁷ 4. 1281

pleasure compared to the chances enjoyed by the promiscuous, where the girl may not be beautiful but she is certainly better than nothing (a nice example of the *parvum quod satis est* argument⁶⁸):

et iacere umorem conlectum in corpora quaeque
nec retinere, semel conversum unius amore
et servare sibi curam certumque dolorem⁶⁹

Lucretius' attitude to love (like his attitude towards politics, greed and death) can thus be seen to be descriptive rather than prescriptive: the romantic lover does not *in fact* enjoy the life of love, as it does not answer the bodily needs which sexual pleasure serves when it is indulged as Epicurus suggests. The romantic lover's attitude to sex is blind, greedy and unsatisfied - the perfect antithesis of the Epicurean ideal of open-eyed moderate pleasure enjoyed even by the primitive man described in book five.⁷⁰ The passage in question is not simply romanticised nostalgia, of course: the fact that we are here at all proves that earlier generations could withstand the sort of privations which we find unbearable and still reproduce, on the syllogistic reasoning:

if men then = men now, then they would not have survived to
breed as we would not breed in those conditions (if, P, then Q)

but they did reproduce (but not-Q)

therefore men then ≠ men now (therefore not-P).

⁶⁸ cf. 2. 20-36, 5. 1412-35

⁶⁹ 4. 1065-7

⁷⁰ 5. 962-965

Furthermore, the description of their life as being conducted *more ferarum* is in itself not necessarily condemnatory, especially as it comes qualified with *vulgivago*, a coinage whose only other use in the poem is one of approval⁷¹. The sexual habits of early man, for instance, are not described with disapproval - on the contrary, the phrasing of

Venus in silvis iungebat corpora amantum

is all too idyllic, recalling the prelude⁷² and the 'natural' love-making of happy union in book 4⁷³ where again 'natural' animal habits are compared with approval over against the unnatural habits of the romantic lover. Of course the love-making is not always a mark of *mutua cupido* but may be caused by *violenta viri vis atque impensa libido*⁷⁴ or by bribery⁷⁵ and there is a definite note of bathos in the sudden lowering of poetic register from the idyllic line 962 to the more brutal lines 964-5, with the added touch of realism in the poet itemising the bribes as humble fruits (*glandes atque arborea vel pira lecta*). It is difficult however to see this passage as simply disgust at the brute nature of the primitive; it is, rather, historical imagination getting to work on the unrecoverable past and seeking to evaluate it with a mind unclouded by either revulsion or nostalgia but animated solely by disinterested logic.

It is these unhealthy aspects of love which Epicurus and Lucretius condemn, rather than the simple fulfilment of bodily need and the

71 4. 1071
 72 cf. esp. 1. 17-20
 73 4. 1193
 74 5. 964

consequent kinetic pleasure to be derived from it. Sexual love is simply a function of the animal body: it does not give our life any meaning in itself. This is naturally why the poet chooses to place the diatribe against love at the end of the book explaining the truth of sense-perception: the lover is deceived by the illusion that his beloved is beautiful⁷⁶ just as one might be deceived by the optical illusions so neatly described by the poet at 4. 324-468, and so his delusion is ideal to end a book on the primacy of correct perception. He is 'mad' in the sense that he is hallucinating⁷⁷ but his madness is more than merely a misconception; his refusal to perceive the truth leads him to fight against the sexual demands of his nature (in that his worship of the unattainable mistress entails retaining his sperm rather than releasing it (4.1066)) and his unrequited love could never become the type of reproductive union the poet endorses at the end of the book anyway - if he ever got close to her he would sense her foulness and flee in disgust (4. 1180ff). The scenario is all fixed by the poet so that the lover cannot win - he is not allowed to achieve pleasurable union with his beloved because she will not let him do so, but it would be hopeless even if she did let him in view of his impossible expectations of what this 'goddess' is really like and his disillusion would destroy his passion. That is why such women keep their illusions safely in place but cannot fool the wise reader:

quo magis ipsae

⁷⁵ although it is not obvious which sex is bribing the other
⁷⁶ cf. the catalogue of euphemisms at 4. 1155-1170
⁷⁷ cf. 4. 1069 with Godwin (1986) 156

omnia summo opere hos vitae postscaenia celant
 quos retinere volunt adstrictosque esse in amore;
 nequiquam, quoniam tu animo tamen omnia possis
 protrahere in lucem atque omnis inquirere risus.⁷⁸

The blind restricted life of the lover (notice the metaphor of being tied in fetters in *adstrictos*) is matched by the theatricality (*postscaenia*) of the meretricious woman: the deceit and deception can only be cured by honest perception and correct interpretation.

In all these cases, therefore, of love, political and social life, we can see that the poet's judgement of human folly rests on the insistence that ethics is a matter of seeing the truth and living in accordance with the perceived facts of nature; ethics is perception of the limitations of human ambition and appetite, recognition that pleasure is the removal of pain and so cannot be increased but only varied when the pain of want has been removed, and above all the insight that the goals of human striving (love, politics, greed) and the objects of human fear (death and its attendant punishments, divine displeasure and retribution) all rely on a misguided misinterpretation of the observable facts of the world and are a waste of time and a needless source of care.

This all ties in neatly with the poet's stance as the observer of the truth and the interpreter of the world, and it gives 'moral' purpose to his detailed observations of nature drawing him close to the position

of Naturalist ethics which asserts that moral judgements are reducible to statements of one of the sciences (usually psychology and/or sociology). It also provides a way in which this poem can be read as having an 'aesthetic' ethical theory, ascribing goodness to physical pleasure and that alone and seeing the enjoyment of such experiences as the source and definition of our notion of good, and arguing that perception of the truth is a prerequisite for ethical goodness - which also leaves the way open for the wise man to enjoy poetry and art both as pleasures in themselves and as the depiction and reminder of such pleasures.

If perception is the key to both knowledge and goodness, then the analysis of perception in 4.26-523 will be ethically crucial. The refutation of Scepticism is central to the ethical argument; there can be no question of an 'aesthetic' ethical philosophy such as this being any more than a fantasy if the senses do not provide us with adequate information and if the mind is not capable of appraising it; and the Sceptics' case is a powerful one which has to be met. Lucretius argues for the veracity of perception in that only matter can affect other matter (i.e. our sense-organs) and so there must be *something* there, and he urges that our perceptions taken all together show up which of them are true and which of them are false. The man standing on the railway line sees the tracks converge at the horizon but also sees a train go past without being derailed; clearly one of these conflicting sense-impressions is false, and as we would be unlikely not to notice a train-derailment but have other experience of

the converging of objects at a distance, we decide that the lines are in fact parallel and only appear to converge. In this way the Epicurean 'sees' conflicting sense-data but allows his sense-impressions to correct each other. Implicit in his epistemology however is the inadequacy of the senses to receive a complete view, as we depend on the *simulacra* to find us and our eyes can only ever (in a finite lifetime) take in a small number of *simulacra*. Perceptions, just like the 'parallel' arguments, become 'ways of seeing' which are all of them reflections of partial truth (1.422-5; 'all perceptions are true' said Epicurus) but which are none of them adequate as a total view of the world, just as there can be no total view of a three-dimensional object. Lucretius points to what we can see for ourselves but have not looked at before, he makes us look afresh at things we have long got used to seeing (sheep on the hillside, clothes drying in the sun, and so on). This is partly the old poetic charge to show 'what oft was thought yet ne'er so well expressed', partly an appeal to *communis sensus* to back up his 'reading' of the world. But it is more than this: Eagleton defines the aesthetic as follows:

Aesthetics is born as a discourse of the body. In its original formulation by the German philosopher Alexander Baumgarten, the term refers not in the first place to art, but, as the Greek *aisthesis* would suggest, to the whole region of human perception and sensation, in contrast to the more rarefied domain of conceptual thought. The distinction which the term 'aesthetic' initially enforces in the mid-eighteenth century is not one between 'art' and 'life', but between the material and the immaterial: between things and thoughts, sensations and ideas, that which is bound up with our creaturely life as opposed to that which conducts some shadowy existence in the recesses of the mind. It is as though philosophy suddenly wakes up to the fact that

there is a dense, swarming territory beyond its own mental enclave which threatens to fall utterly outside its sway. That territory is nothing less than the whole of our sensate life together - the business of affections and aversions, of how the world strikes the body on its sensory surfaces, of that which takes root in the gaze and the guts and all that arises from our most banal, biological insertion into the world. The aesthetic concerns this most gross and palpable dimension of the human, which post-Cartesian philosophy, in some curious lapse of attention, has somehow managed to overlook. It is thus the first stirrings of a primitive materialism - of the body's long inarticulate rebellion against the tyranny of the theoretical.

...Could it be that this realm is impenetrably opaque to reason, eluding its categories as surely as the smell of thyme or the taste of potatoes? Must the life of the body be given up on, as the sheer unthinkable other of thought, or are its mysterious ways somehow mappable by intellection in what would then prove a wholly novel science, the science of sensibility itself?⁷⁹

This definition suits Lucretius best in his thorough-going reliance on the sense-experience of the body rather than the theoretical structures of the mind. This is (again) not to deny the place of theory and reason in Lucretius' philosophy: but it secures perception as the means of gathering the data upon which reason then goes to work, whereas Plato clearly regarded reason as superior to sense-perception which can (in his opinion) only furnish opinion rather than truth. For Epicurus and Lucretius, as we have seen, all perceptions are true, and there is nothing that can gainsay the evidence of the senses:

invenies primis ab sensibus esse creatam
notitiam veri neque sensus posse refelli.
nam maiore fide debet reperier illud
sponte sua veris quod possit vincere falsa.
quid maiore fide porro quam sensus haberi
debet? an ab sensu falso ratio orta valebit
dicere eos contra, quae tota ab sensibus orta est?
qui nisi sunt veri, ratio quoque falsa fit omnis.
an poterunt oculos aures reprehendere, an aures
tactus? an hunc porro tactum sapor arguet oris,

⁷⁹ Eagleton 13-14

an confutabunt nares oculive revincent.
non, ut opinor, ita est.⁸⁰

Lucretius takes on Plato directly: if reason is sprung from the senses then it cannot be superior to them because it has no source of knowledge other than the senses. It can work on the sense-data presented to it in a variety of ways, some of which are more rational than others, but it cannot find any data to qualify or correct these sense-impressions from any other source. Furthermore, the senses are all as valid as one another and must all be credited with veracity subject to qualification provided by judicious comparisons. The argument is not watertight by any means: by admitting that the senses conflict with one another he prompts the question in the reader's mind of how we can ever trust any of them over the others, for instance. Again, however, the poet does not merely state this argument baldly, but invests his writing with rhetorical force, the importance of defeating the Sceptics' case being shown by the means used to do so: the repetition of key words and phrases (*maiore fide...quid maiore fide: ab sensu orta...ab sensibus orta*), the expressive juxtaposition of *sensu falso ratio* which neatly suggests that *sensu falso* entails *falsa ratio*, as asserted in 485. There then follows an almost cartoon depiction of the war of the senses to ridicule the notion, linking the various senses in neat chiasmic pairs (*oculos aures...aures tactus..tactum sapor*), ending the sequence, as it began, with the eyes. There is *variatio* of vocabulary denoting the idea of 'refute' with a sequence

rising from censure (*reprehendere*), formal accusation (*arguet*), stunned into silence (*confutabunt*), and finally win the case (*revincent*). The mouth is credited with the verbal fireworks in *arguet*: the sequence of *an* phrases is varied in length, the last one being a rounded whole line. Once again, the poet creates his own material, asserting the inviolable validity of the senses by a material *display* of proof which itself has a marked and perceptible effect on the reader; the poetry is no mere description in a cerebral sense but an embodiment of what it describes. The reader is asked to judge the case being fought out between the senses and also between the poet and the Sceptics; and if the argumentation is not totally cogent, that is perhaps because a full refutation of the Sceptic's case cannot be made, but more likely here because the aesthetic poet's stance is that we can *see* that it is wrong. The senses convince us of their primacy because we can sense it - a circular argument, to be sure, but one of aesthetic more than logical force. Reason is incapable of gainsaying perception, so let us simply see the truth and then let reason work on what we see; this is how this poet uses perception to reveal the truth.

The first way, therefore, in which the *de Rerum Natura* is an aesthetic poem is in the epistemological sense: the senses are for the poet the prime means of experiencing and understanding the world around us. Quite irrespective of value-judgements on the 'beauty' or otherwise of the world - a common concern of 'aesthetic' philosophy -

the poem is aesthetic because it relies totally on *αἴσθησις* to formulate theories about the nature of things and also our own ethical best interests.

What emerges clearly from all the above is that for Lucretius ethics just as much as (e.g.) metallurgy is a matter of discovery rather than divine revelation, that perception unclouded by anxiety or superstition is the best means to determining happiness, and that overall our ethical lives ought to avoid conflict and engagement in the world of social climbing, love and political power. The ethical teachings of Lucretius are, as we saw in the first chapter, apparently inadequate to the monumental authority of the physical teachings, but they do have a coherence which makes them more than mere ramshackle observations. What ties them together is the stress on perception as the key to learning the ethical as well as the empirical truth about ourselves and the world. The passages so far examined are predominantly negative in mood; avoid politics, love and regard justice as the compromise arrived at by weak human beings in the process of societal development. The issues are decided in a positivist manner by the perceived facts of nature and human nature, the ethics being thus deduced from and as certain as the science in which they are embedded. In this sense, then, the ethics of the poem are 'aesthetic' in that they rely totally on our correct perception of the world.

CHAPTER THREE: THE AESTHETIC PLEASURE OF SEEING

The first two chapters of this thesis have seen the ethical poverty of the poem in quantitative terms and an attempt to demonstrate that the ethical teaching which the text does contain is 'aesthetic' in the sense that it derives from the raw perception (aisthesis) of the world and our place within it; the ethics and the science are thus inextricably entwined and should not be seen as rival objectives competing for our attention. The science has an ethical purpose in proving the way of life which Epicurus recommends, while the ethics needs the science to be any more than shifting sands of the *suasoria*.

The term 'aesthetic' conveys a great deal more than that, however - not only the perception of the world but also the evaluative appreciation of its beauty or ugliness which can lead to pleasure and pain; and it is the topic of pleasure in general and aesthetic pleasure in particular which this chapter will examine.

THE PLEASURE OF SEEING

When Lucretius talks of how Epicurus

exposuitque bonum summum quo tendimus omnes¹

that *summum bonum* is always understood to be pleasure. The topic is complex, but certain features of the Epicurean notion of pleasure and pain are agreed by everyone. Epicurus divided pleasure into kinetic pleasure and katastematic pleasure, the former involving change in the sense-organs to remove pain, the second being a state of contentment or freedom from pain (*ἀπονία*) approaching the state of total serenity (*ἀταραξία*) which is the ethical goal: 'The ancient sources agree that Epicurus identified unsurpassable pleasure, the fullness of pleasure, which he called a stable condition of the flesh and a confident expectation for the future on this score with a complete absence of pain and anxiety.'² Pleasure - even katastematic pleasure - like everything else in the universe, is material and is the result of atomic movement. Pleasure and pain alert the human body to what it needs and what it does not need and is an experience of the senses; it is thus diagnostic of how we should live and we ignore it at our peril. Epicurus saw pleasure and pain as at least in some ways two sides of the same coin in that kinetic pleasure consists in removing the pain of want, as for instance in the ingestion of food to dispel the pain of hunger, where he asserts that the pleasure of eating will be in proportion to the pain of the hunger that preceded it and the katastematic pleasure of not being hungry is superior to both. Once the pain of want has been quelled, the pleasure cannot be increased but only varied³ and such 'wants' are only to be quelled where they are 'natural' in the Epicurean classification which divides pleasures up into three groups:

² Rist (1972) 106

³ Diogenes Laertius 10. 130-131, Lucretius *DRN* 2. 20-21

a) natural and necessary (food), b) natural but not necessary (sex) and c) neither natural nor necessary ('luxuries'). The first must be satisfied, the second may be satisfied in moderation, the third not at all⁴. The definition of 'luxury' is not simple - but the term is more helpfully understood to denote an attitude towards pleasure rather than any particular form of it: when hungry, the wise man will eat whatever is to hand whereas the fool addicted to 'luxury' will remain hungry while he holds out for turbot; this is most readily seen in Lucretius' account of romantic love, where the *miser* lover holds on to his sperm waiting for the unattainable mistress while the *samus* will expend it on whoever is available:

et iacere umorem conlectum in corpora quaeque
nec retinere, semel conversum unius amore,
et servare sibi curam certumque dolorem;⁵

One key concept of Epicurean pleasure is *parvum quod satis est*, put thus by Epicurus: οὐδὲν ἱκανὸν ᾧ ὀλίγον τὸ ἱκανόν⁶. This has usually been cited to counter the allegation that Epicurean ethical theory was arrant selfish hedonism with a picture of the sage as a man of austerity and restraint - although Epicurus counselled restraint even over restraint: 'frugality too has a limit, and the man who disregards it is in a like case with the man who errs through excess'⁷. 'Moderation in all things' seems, then, to have been the wise man's goal; we would all opt

⁴ Diogenes Laertius 10. 127, K.A. 29, Cicero *de finibus* 1.38

⁵ 4. 1065-7; cf. Horace *Satires* 1.2.114-9

⁶ Fragment 68 (Bailey); better in Aelian's version ᾧ ὀλίγον οὐκ ἱκανόν, ἀλλὰ τουτῷ γε οὐδὲν ἱκανόν (*Var. Hist.* iv.13, cited Bailey (1926) 386

⁷ Fragment 63 (Bailey)

for the privilege of not being hungry, not being thirsty, not being cold⁸ and the pleasure of removing the pain is less preferable than the state of contentment which would remove both; rather like the donkey in *Animal Farm* who asserts that God gave him a tail to swish the flies, but that he would prefer to have no tail and no flies. In practical terms, this means that the wise man will seek contentment where it may be found rather than setting his standards too high and incurring certain disappointment.

The prime source of that consciousness which feels and evaluates pleasure and pain is perception, which is also, as we saw in chapter two, the arbiter of goodness:

ἐπεὶ πᾶν ἀγαθὸν καὶ κακὸν ἐν αἰσθήσει.⁹
καὶ διὰ τοῦτο τὴν ἡδονὴν ἀρχὴν καὶ τέλος λέγομεν εἶναι τοῦ μακαρίως ζῆν. ταύτην γὰρ ἀγαθὸν πρῶτον καὶ συγγενικὸν ἔγνωμεν, καὶ ἀπὸ ταύτης καταρχόμεθα πάσης αἰρέσεως καὶ φυγῆς καὶ ἐπὶ ταύτην καταντῶμεν ὡς κανόνι τῷ πάθει πᾶν ἀγαθὸν κρίνοντες.¹⁰

In case we are in danger of exaggerating the cerebral nature of Epicurean pleasure, it is worth remembering that Epicurus is said to have said:

οὐ γὰρ ἔγωγε ἔχω τί ποιησῶ τὰγαθόν, ἀφαιρῶν μὲν τὰς διὰ χυλῶν ἡδονάς, ἀφαιρῶν δὲ τὰς δι' ἀφροδισίων καὶ τὰς δι' ἀκροαμάτων καὶ τὰς διὰ μορφῆς¹¹

Lucretius shares the concept of pleasure adumbrated above, although he rather assumes the Epicurean conclusions than argues towards them. The rich man's addictions to luxury are mocked, for

⁸ *Vatican Sayings* 33

⁹ Diogenes Laertius 10.124

¹⁰ Diogenes Laertius 10. 128-9

¹¹ Diogenes Laertius 10. 6

instance, as compared to the good things freely available to the wise man (2.20-36); so also mockery is directed at his neurotic boredom (3.1060-1070); the romantic lover's addiction to an unavailable and unworthy mistress is contrasted unfavourably with the sensible marriage with a good woman, just as early man's use of what is natural contrasts with modern man's rejection of that in favour of luxuries and consequent warfare (5.1412-1435).

More positively, Lucretius uses the words *suavis* and *voluptas* of a range of experiences: Venus is addressed¹² as *hominum divumque voluptas*, for whom the earth sends forth *suavis* flowers. The poet is inspired by the anticipation of *voluptas* in the *suavis amicitia* of Memmius, *suavis amicitia* which *suadet* the poet to spend the nights writing¹³, just as men are led by *voluptas* to reproduce¹⁴. This pleasure is not a blind instinctive reflex, however: the tiny *clinamen* gives us the freedom to choose pleasure or not¹⁵, while to feel *voluptas* at all one must be a compound made up of many atoms, as that pleasure is inner movement of the atoms themselves¹⁶, and fear is capable of adulterating pleasure to the point where no pleasure will be left *liquidam puramque*¹⁷. The body is even capable of feeling pain and pleasure simultaneously in different parts of the body¹⁸, although the centre of such feelings is

¹² 1.1

¹³ 1.140-142

¹⁴ 2. 172-4

¹⁵ 2. 251-262, on which see Fowler (1983a)

¹⁶ and so atoms themselves do not feel pain or pleasure: 2. 963-972

¹⁷ 3. 40

¹⁸ 3.106-111

primarily in the breast¹⁹ where (the poet tells us) the centre of intelligence

is. Seeking new pleasures is a futile labour of Sisyphus:

nec nova vivendo procuditur ulla voluptas;
sed dum abest quod avemus, id exsuperare videtur
cetera: post aliud, cum contigit illud, avemus
et sitis aequa tenet vitae semper hiantis²⁰

as is the pathetic attempt either to extend one's span of life²¹ or to

gorge oneself in pleasures once the want has been removed²².

The pleasure of eating is confined to the mouth and palate²³, just as the pleasure of sex is the ejaculation of semen²⁴. The whole passage on the passion of sexual love is instructive in its reductionist view of sexual pleasure - the gazing at *simulacra* which are by definition as insubstantial as anything can be²⁵, the ardent desire, the violent love-play are all unnecessary and empty, while the real pleasure is in the ejaculation which the poet denotes in a brief phrase²⁶.

Pleasure keeps us willing to live²⁷ but is not restricted to the basics of food and sex and warmth: the poet describes how he feels a divine *voluptas atque horror* at seeing nature revealed²⁸ just as early man discovered pleasure in song and dance²⁹ and just as the Muses' song is called *suaviloquenti*³⁰; sleep³¹ and even fainting are called *suavis*³².

19 3. 138-42

20 3. 1081-4

21 3. 931-51

22 5. 1416-35

23 4. 627-629

24 4. 1057 where the verb *praesagit* is revealing about the pleasure of sex not being in the anticipation.

25 4. 110-122

26 4. 1056, 1115

27 5. 178

28 3. 28-9

29 5. 1379-1411

30 1. 945 = 4.20

31 4.453

where there is movement of the soul-atoms no doubt but hardly kinetic stimulation of the senses - indeed both involve a cessation of sensation which might be said to contradict Epicurus' words³³ that all good is to be found in sensation but may be said to look towards the 'katastematic' pleasure which is the cessation of sensory disturbance - sleep and fainting do after all produce a state of (temporary and involuntary) *ataraxia*.

Far more important for this thesis is the question of aesthetic pleasure; and the evidence on Epicurus' views on the subject are scant. 'I spit upon the beautiful and those who vainly admire it, when it does not produce any pleasure'³⁴ has been taken³⁵ to indicate a blanket rejection of aesthetic appreciation - whereas in fact it surely indicates more of an 'emperor's-new-clothes' attitude which rejects notions of beauty and moral goodness which do not in fact produce pleasure³⁶. If, as he asserts, pleasure is the *summum bonum*, then clearly his attitude towards beauty as towards virtues and everything else must be that they are only to be sought if they are conducive to pleasure and discarded if not³⁷.

The attitude of pleasure in learning is however crucial in Epicurus: early on in the *Letter to Herodotus* he describes his total commitment to *φυσιολογία* and thus enjoying *ἐγγαληνίζων* his life³⁸.

It is axiomatic that if the removal of pain is pleasure and if philosophy can remove the pain of anxiety for ever, then philosophy is a source of

³² 3. 172-3

³³ D.L. X. 124 quoted above

³⁴ Fragment 79 (Bailey) (=Usener 512)

³⁵ by e.g. Bailey (1926) 400

³⁶ well glossed by Rist ((1972 124) as 'I spit on the beautiful and those who pointlessly respect it when it produces no pleasure'

³⁷ Diogenes Laertius 10. 132, 138

pleasure; and Epicurus takes pains to point out that the pleasure of philosophy is not merely the pleasurable end-product of a painful process but that rather: 'in all other occupations the fruit comes painfully after completion, but in philosophy pleasure goes hand in hand with knowledge; for enjoyment does not follow comprehension, but comprehension and enjoyment are simultaneous.'³⁹ The study of nature does have beneficial moral effects on the character in promoting *αὐτάρκεια*⁴⁰ but it is to be indulged for its pleasure first and foremost. If, after all, comprehension of the world is achieved through *αἴσθησις* and if enjoyment and comprehension are simultaneous, then this *αἴσθησις* will itself achieve enjoyment and thus the pleasure which is the ethical end of Epicureanism. Delight in learning for its own sake, even when the subject matter is not at first sight attractive, is nothing new: Aristotle explicitly says as much in his *Parts of Animals*:

There are animals which are unattractive to the senses when one studies them; but even in these, nature's craftsmanship provides innumerable pleasures for those who can discern the causes⁴¹.

Lucretius clearly shared this pleasure in *φυσιολογία* as is plain from several passages. The poet describes how he spends his time in the study of nature and how this study of nature gives him the pleasure which

³⁸ Diogenes Laertius 10. 37

³⁹ V.S. 27

⁴⁰ V.S. 45

is the key to happiness; early in the poem we read of the poet's labour of love in turning the 'dark discoveries' of the Greeks into Latin and how the problems are offset by the rewards:

sed tua me virtus tamen et sperata voluptas
suavis amicitiae quemvis efferre laborem
suadet, et inducit noctes vigilare serenas
quaerentem dictis quibus et quo carmine demum
clara tuae possim praepandere lumina menti
res quibus occultas penitus convisere possis⁴²

The pleasure here is primarily one of anticipated friendship (*sperata voluptas suavis amicitiae*) with the oxymoronic positioning of *suavis* and *laborem* at opposite ends of the line; but there is also a clear sense of the pleasure of achievement involved in rendering light what was dark⁴³ and the theme of light is stressed repeatedly (*clara... lumina*). The passage contains more, however. The nights through which the poet stays awake are *serenas* - a clear reference to the Epicurean pleasure of *ataraxia*⁴⁴ as well as a more obvious remark about the quietness of night-time as Bailey sees it⁴⁵. The poet, in other words, enjoys the supreme Epicurean state of contentment even though he is engaged in the *labor* of expressing it. Furthermore, as Brown notes⁴⁶, there is a *figura etymologica* in *suavis...suadet*, 'bringing out the central tenet of Epicurean moral theory - that the prospect of something pleasant (*suavis*) is automatically a spur to action (*suadet*)'. The process of composition

⁴¹ Aristotle *Parts of Animals* 645a8-15; cf. *Metaphysics* 1.1.980a20 ('All human beings by nature desire knowledge') and 982b12 ('philosophy begins from astonishment')

⁴² 1. 140-145

⁴³ cf. the poet's claim to fame as one who writes light verses on dark themes (4. 8-9 = 1. 933-4)

⁴⁴ see Epicurus *Letter to Herodotus* 37 (ἐγγαληνίζων)

⁴⁵ 'a picturesque epithet, which suggests the calm uninterrupted nights of study.' (Bailey (1947) ii. 624)

is well expressed in the sequence of prose draft (*dictis*) followed by verse (*carmine*); and the purpose of the composition is to allow the reader to 'see' what is 'deeply hidden'.

Later on, when he sees the truth about the gods and the underworld, he tells us:

his ibi me rebus quaedam divina voluptas
percipit atque horror, quod sic natura tua vi
tam manifesta patens ex omni parte resecta est⁴⁷

where the primary pleasure is clearly visual and aesthetic. Notice the repetition of the visual idea in *manifesta patens...resecta*⁴⁸ and the punning use of *percipit* in the line before where the primary meaning 'gets hold upon me' (M.F. Smith, OLD s.v. 'percipio' 8b) also has a secondary meaning of 'perceive through the senses, apprehend' (OLD 6) and to 'to grasp with the mind' (OLD 7; cf. *DRN* 2.731, 6.536), leaving the reader with the faint paradox that when he perceives the world as it is, the pleasure of such perception seizes hold of him in a reciprocal grasp.

The pleasure of discovering and describing the nature of things is repeatedly expressed. In book 2 we read:

nunc age dicta meo dulci quaesita labore
percipe⁴⁹

where the act of creating the text is *dulcis*: a notion repeated later:

nunc age, nativos animantibus et mortalis
esse animos animasque levis ut noscere possis,
conquisita diu dulcique reperta labore

⁴⁶ Brown (1984) 72

⁴⁷ 3. 28-30

⁴⁸ 'this emphasis on revelation and illumination returns the reader to the point of departure in 1.' (Kenney (1971) 79), referring to *how* the poet uses ring-composition in the passage; more significant is the question of *why* the poet chose this theme in the first place, and how the theme of revelation underlies everything in the text.

⁴⁹ 2. 730-1

digna tua pergam disponere carmina vita⁵⁰

Kenney (*ad loc*) asserts that this phrase is a 'literary formula... the reference is to L.'s poetic shaping of his material rather than to his philosophical researches' but this does not do justice to the passage or to the text as a whole. Bailey had already seen that the poet 'emphasises both the labour that he has spent in thinking out (*reperta*) and arranging (*disponere*) this part of the poem and also the pleasure (*dulci*) which it has given him'.⁵¹ The pleasure does of course consist of literary pleasure peculiar to the poetic form in which the discoveries are communicated, and there is more to say on this topic later - but the discoveries here are *conquisita diu* with sweet labour in one line before their poetic form is decided in the next. In a moment of candour, the poet describes his enthusiasm for philosophical poetry invading his dreams:

et quo quisque fere studio devinctus adhaeret
aut quibus in rebus multum sumus ante morati,
atque in ea ratione fuit contenta magis mens,
in somnis eadem plerumque videmur obire:
causidici causas agere et componere leges,
induperatores pugnare et proelia obire,
nautae contractum cum ventis degere bellum,
nos agere hoc autem et naturam quaerere rerum
semper et inventam patriis exponere chartis.⁵²

just as in a piece of real self-mockery he describes his avidity and pleasurable (*suavis*) fluency in producing material:

quod si pigraris paulumve recesseris ab re,
hoc tibi de plano possum promittere, Memmi:
usque adeo largos haustus e fontibus magnis

⁵⁰ 3. 417-20

⁵¹ Bailey (1947) ii. 1066

⁵² 4. 962-70

lingua meo suavis diti de pectore fundet
 ut verear ne tarda prius per membra senectus
 serpat et in nobis vitae claustra resolvat,
 quam tibi de quavis una re versibus omnis
 argumentorum sit copia missa per auris.⁵³

It is at least arguable, then, that the text expresses and produces aesthetic pleasure in the study of nature itself even before that study has been conveyed in poetry - a form which, the poet assures us twice⁵⁴, adds honey to the medicine to entice the sick but which is not itself the medicine being administered. Aesthetic pleasure is to be found in the study of nature itself as well as in the appreciation of the verse in which that study is expressed, as Aristotle so well expressed in the passage quoted earlier⁵⁵.

The pleasure, then, in writing and reading the *de rerum natura* is (so far) twofold. In the first place the text rids us of the pain of fear by teaching us that we have nothing to fear from the gods or from the afterlife. In the second place, there is pleasure in learning about the world in itself. Both of these points are well seen at work in Book 6, where the *ratio caeli* is to be explained to prevent the reader suffering superstitious fears⁵⁶ but the poet immediately begs to be inspired by the Muse who is *requies hominum divumque voluptas*⁵⁷. When one goes on to read the account of celestial phenomena, the poet's excitement and pleasure is obvious in the text, for instance:

⁵³ 1. 410-417

⁵⁴ 1. 935-950 = 4. 10-25

⁵⁵ Aristotle *Parts of Animals* 645a8-15

⁵⁶ 6. 86-9

⁵⁷ 6. 92-4

hoc etiam pacto volucris loca lumine tingunt
 nubes et tremulo tempestas impete fulgit:
 ventus ubi invasit nubem et versatus ibidem
 fecit ut ante cavam docui spissescere nubem,
 mobilitate sua fervescit; ut omnia motu
 percalefacta vides ardescere, plumbea vero
 glans etiam longo cursu volvenda liquescit.⁵⁸

This is no straight factual account but a burst of joy in the world of sensual experience. The cloud/storm is endowed with enormous power, such that it paints (*tingunt*) the sky with light and then attacks with an attack to make all shake (*tremulo...impete*). The text takes pleasure in recalling earlier teachings (*ut ante docui*) and in the precision of its account of things to which no human observer could testify (who could observe the inside of a cloud?) which endow the poet with godlike status as the revealer of what is hidden from human eye. The poet revels in the force and the heat of the storm, using a telling simile from the world of ballistics to convey both, with the piquant surprise that the heavy leaden bullet is like the fluffy clouds in the air; just as earlier on he used the appropriate 'bird' metaphor of *volucris* for the speed of light in the sky. More pertinently, the object is heated 'right through' (*percalefacta*) rather than just on the surface - again showing the superior 'inside' knowledge of the poet being revealed to the reader, whose own sensual experience is constantly referred to personally (*vides*).

The final book of the poem is often seen as something of a rag-bag of afterthoughts - celestial and meteorological phenomena with little in common except their strangeness, culminating in the unusually miserable spectacle of the plague with which the poem ends. Those who

see the poem as simply a celebration of the joys of Epicureanism would find fault with the poet for organising things thus, or postulate that the thing was clearly incomplete and needed a rousing peroration which the poet did not live to provide. The fact that the poem ends the way it does calls for us to look again at our interpretation of the text and see if we can find a better frame of reference with which to account for the apparent eccentricities of the final book. If the first two books explained the atomic nature of matter and the following three books explained the nature of man - his mortality, his knowledge of the world and the nature of human society - then what is the last book there for? To mop up a few loose ends?

This thesis would argue that one purpose of the final book is to demonstrate the aesthetic pleasure which the text recommends and embodies and which this chapter has been arguing for. The subject matter of this last book is thunder and lightning and meteorological wonders, followed by the wonders of the earth - earthquakes, volcanoes, the Nile, Avernian lakes and springs, the magnet, ending up with the 'miracle' of the pestilence which can turn the world upside down in a matter of hours. There are many topics under the universal heading of *de rerum natura* which the poet does not deal with - his choice here is of areas of *wonder*, to invite the reader to contemplate with pleasure those things which both delight the senses and puzzle the mind, giving the intellectual pleasure of understanding and the aesthetic pleasure of sensual enjoyment of the view.

It is after all a central tenet of this thesis that if pleasure is the good and if contemplating the world can give us aesthetic pleasure, then such study of nature as the poet shows us here will be a form of goodness in itself and such study will be an ethical recommendation for those wishing to lead the good life.

The poet's purpose in this book is of course partly (and explicitly) theological as well as logical: thunder is given the greatest prominence because it played the largest part in Roman religion, earthquakes were seen as the work of the 'earth-shaker' Poseidon in Homeric epic and elsewhere, volcanoes were explained as giants buried under the earth belching fire⁵⁹, plagues were sent by Apollo, and so on. The book is thus there to prove to the reader that even these 'miracles' do not support the theological view of the world which the poem seeks to destroy - and the poet mocks the view of the divine source of thunderbolts with a lengthy piece of comic satire⁶⁰ - just as the fourth book explains that the apparent visions of ghosts do not prove that human beings survive death. The use of the senses will stop the needless superstitious 'wonder' which invokes the gods:

quod bene propositum si plane contueare
ac videas plane, mirari multa relinquis.⁶¹

The emphasis throughout is accordingly on the experience of the senses. Thunder and lightning are marvellous in themselves - but note how the poet takes pains to explain the way our senses perceive them at

⁵⁹ e.g. Typhoeus in Homer *Iliad* 2. 781-4; cf. also Callimachus *Hymn to Delos* 141ff
⁶⁰ 6. 379-422

different times (6. 164-172), just as he points out the manifest fact that thunderbolts do not occur in a clear sky (246-9). Later on volcanoes are explained with a simile from erisypelas fever in the body (655-672) which looks forward to the closing passage on the plague; and the explanation of the magnet has the familiar references to the taste of salt when walking by the sea⁶²; the poet refers to his own sense-experience:

exultare etiam Samothracia ferrea vidi⁶³

and to ours too in encouraging us to find examples for ourselves:

nec tamen haec ita sunt aliarum rerum aliena
ut mihi multa parum genere ex hoc suppeditentur
quae memorare queam inter se singlariter apta.
saxa vides primum...⁶⁴

As we approach the end of the poem the poet is leaving us with the techniques of further study for ourselves:

cetera iam quam multa licet reperire!⁶⁵

as long as the superstitious *mirari* of the uneducated has been retrained by correct use of the senses. Formerly such things as thunder and plagues aroused wonder and fear: the Epicurean regards them with wonder and confident understanding.

61 6. 653-4
62 6. 928-9; cf. 4.222-3
63 6. 1044
64 6. 1065-8
65 6. 1080

THE PLEASURE OF POETRY

All the above could have been done in prose - is there any further aesthetic pleasure in the peculiarly poetic form of the text? The quotation from Aristotle⁶⁶ used earlier to show the pleasure in *φυσιολογία* is again pertinent when quoted in full:

‘There are animals which are unattractive to the senses when one studies them; but even in these, Nature's craftsmanship provides innumerable pleasures for those who can discern the causes. It would be unreasonable - in fact, absurd - if we got pleasure from studying pictures of these things, because then we are at the same time studying the art which crafted them, but did not get even more pleasure from studying the actual products of nature - at least when we can make out their causes.’⁶⁷

In other words, the appreciation of art is one thing, the study of nature is another, and the artistic depiction of nature renders the pleasure indirect and oblique. Once we start to look more closely at the relationship of poetry and pleasure we run into questions of the relationship between the so-called kinetic and the katastematic pleasures, a question which is revealing about the status of the poetry within the philosophy. We saw earlier how Epicurus regarded the state of neither pleasure nor pain as being one of contentment, a state obviously

⁶⁶ Aristotle *Parts of Animals* 645a8-15

⁶⁷ Aristotle *Parts of Animals* 645a8-15

preferable to the pain of lack but also preferable to the alteration in the sense-organs of kinetic pleasure. The disturbance of kinetic pleasure is obviously preferable to the pain of (say) hunger but inferior to the state of katastematic pleasure which feels neither the pain of hunger nor needs the pleasure of eating. If poetry could be interpreted in the same way, it ought to qualify as a kinetic pleasure (in that it disturbs the senses), but the result of the poetry - certainly the result of this philosophical poetry - will be the katastematic contentment which does not need the stimulus of poetry any more; yet the poet describes the nights he spends composing verses as *serenae*⁶⁸, and the imagery of pastoral happiness which he creates as a metaphor for his poetry is that of peace and quiet contentment:

avia Pieridum peragro loca nullius ante
trita solo. iuvat integros accedere fontes
atque haurire, iuvatque novos decerpere flores...⁶⁹

Lucretius describes the contemplation of the universe as being itself a state of *voluptas*⁷⁰, and the opening of book 2 is eloquent on the pleasure of looking at the world from a safe vantage-point of wisdom. Both situations are, however, hard to see purely in katastematic terms - writing poetry involves movement of ideas and atoms within the brain, the sight of 'disturbing' phenomena will itself disturb the wise man's tranquillity, however pleasant it may be, and laughter (for instance) is a disturbance of one's equilibrium, however welcome. Nowhere, furthermore, is there any sense that Lucretius is 'making do' with poetry

⁶⁸ 1.142. Bailey describes the adjective as 'picturesque'.

⁶⁹ 4.1-3: cf the rustic setting of early man's first artistic efforts at 5. 1379-1411

as preparation for 'real' wisdom - in one passage he is rejoicing in the poetry and the hope of Memmius' friendship⁷¹, in the second he is expressing a contentment which poetry conveys and in some senses maintains in permanent form⁷². The poem does assert strongly the folly of pursuing certain forms of pleasure (love etc) and in place of these it encourages the reader to enjoy the aesthetic pleasures of seeing the world through the clear eyes of poetry; but at no point does Lucretius explicitly guide us through the distinction between the kinetic and the katastematic forms of pleasure, and the poetry which purports to convert the reader's priorities must surely 'move' and 'disturb' him with kinetic emotion⁷³, only to be succeeded by a state of static wisdom or katastematic pleasure.

The study of nature is an Epicurean pleasure in itself⁷⁴ as we saw; and yet it is obvious that the poet of the *de rerum natura* was not content to produce a prose treatise which could have done the job of conveying the causes of things⁷⁵ as well as this didactic epic poem. Poetic inspiration is sought from Calliope, the Muse of epic poetry, and the glory looked for is the crown of poetic originality :

insignemque meo capiti petere inde coronam
unde prius nulli velarint tempore Musae⁷⁶

⁷⁰ 3. 28-30

⁷¹ 1. 140-145

⁷² 4. 1-25: poets immortalise their subjects: Lucretius is immortalising both Epicurus and also the (already immortal) atoms themselves.

⁷³ who could not be disturbed on reading of the death of Iphigeneia (1. 84-101)? Unless it is urged that in the long run such poetry stills the unruly passions of the breast and so inculcates serenity?

⁷⁴ V.S. 27

⁷⁵ the achievement with which Vergil credits him in *Georgics* 2. 490-2 rather than any poetic glory.

⁷⁶ 4. 4-5

which all suggests that the text is using poetry as more than a mere package, despite the poet's immediate protests that the poetry is merely the honey on the medicine cup. The logic of 4.1-25 forces the reader to regard the poem as simply therefore a means to an end (enlightenment), a tool to be discarded once the job has been done, a bottle of medicine and honey which the sick child needs but not the mature philosopher who will need neither the medicine nor the honey. The poet implies that his message is too important not to convey but that it would seem unattractive (*tristior*) unless dressed up, and so he has had no choice but to smear everything with the sweet honey

si tibi forte animum tali ratione tenere
versibus in nostris possem, dum percipis omnem
naturam rerum ac persentis utilitatem.⁷⁷

This all raises questions about the genre of didactic: what is didactic and how is it distinguished as a genre? In many ways all literature is 'didactic' in that it purports to inform the reader of what he does not know. In modern literature it is possible to argue that non-fiction is didactic while fiction is not, as the element of fantasy and imagination (proper to fiction) is out of place in a treatise on the Domesday Book - but even here there are overlaps which are difficult to schematise (historical novels, for instance). In ancient literature the stories told in (e.g.) Homer are not seen as fiction but history, and when the ancients came to write fiction they did so in prose. How then to distinguish the

'didactic' from the rest? Hesiod is a case in point: the *Works and Days* is 'obviously' didactic in that it teaches Perses precepts and information which Perses will need in his life. It contains a good deal of mythological information but its purpose is directed towards the ethical state of Perses. The *Theogony* on the other hand is also generally classified as 'didactic' even though it is not addressed to a named dedicatee (as are the *Works and Days* and most later didactic poems) nor seems to be aiming to improve the ethical state of the reader but simply to teach him the tales of the gods; in what sense, if any, is this distinct from Homer 'teaching' us the tales of Troy? The vital didactic element in the *Theogony* is the manner in which the reader is told the 'facts' about the origin of the world in a descriptive way in which later on Empedocles, Lucretius etc would also compose. The *Theogony* is heroic epic cosmogony: it is told because it purports to be a true account of the world. It is didactic because the purpose of instruction is more explicitly carried out than in other poetry.

It is also told because it is entertaining. The two elements of utility and pleasure⁷⁸ have often been seen as mutually exclusive, particularly in didactic literature⁷⁹ where the parade of useless information might be anything but entertaining. The same, however, might be said of the Catalogue of Ships which concludes Homer *Iliad* 2, a passage of repetitious *ecphrasis* which holds up the narrative for

⁷⁸ as in Horace *Ars Poetica* 333

⁷⁹ see e.g. Effe (1977) 9-22

several hundred lines. Contrast with that the wonderful extempore didacticism of Silenus in Vergil *Eclogue* 6.31-83 compelled out of the old man solely for the pleasure of hearing it. There is enough didactic literature surviving (and enough information on the texts which do not) to conclude that the transmission of information was seen as a proper and an enjoyable method for the poet to adopt. Had the didactic epic been as unpopular with the ancients as it has been with some scholars, it is hard to believe that the poets would have continued to produce these thankless efforts⁸⁰.

Didactic was generally seen as a branch of epic rather than a separate genre in itself⁸¹; it is arguable that didactic becomes something of a *Mischgattung* in which high and low, drama, epic, satire, diatribe etc all interact and collide. The traditional picture sees heroic epic as tending to tell dynamic stories of heroes in action, while didactic tends towards the more static form of description which expounds, depicts and also explains the world - its origins, its nature, its future - to the reader; Heroic epic however contains ecphrasis⁸², didactic epic tells stories (such as those in Hesiod, or Lucretius 1.84-101). There is a great deal of sense in seeing the ancient concept of *genera* as being one of metrical differences rather than our concept of 'genres'⁸³: certainly the attempt to schematise Lucretius in this way will not work.

⁸⁰ on the Roman didactic poets see esp. Pöhlmann (1973) and Cox (1969)

⁸¹ see Gale (1994) 99-106

⁸² on which see now D.P. Fowler (1991)

⁸³ Gale (1994) 100 + n.4

Didactic is not mentioned a great deal in ancient theorists of Literature⁸⁴; but we do have the occasional programmatic text such as Propertius 3.5.23-48.

Propertius sees the subject matter of didactic as an old man's game; when too old for love he will learn the ways of Nature. The interesting point here is that he sets his didactic mode after an Epicurean attack on the pursuit of military might and political power, whereby Marius and Jugurtha are both equal in death⁸⁵. True pleasure is to be found in peace (*pacis amor deus est*), study of nature and in rejection of luxury and ambition: He ends with a sardonic challenge to politicians to bring back Crassus' standards. This is equating the apolitical stance of the love-poet with the apolitical remoteness of the intellectual, putting the didactic poet and the love-poet side-by-side. Most interesting for our purposes is the extremely Epicurean stance adopted by the poet, almost as if 'didactic' by then meant 'Lucretian'.

Some interesting tentative conclusions about the didactic genre may be drawn so far. Firstly, all didactic poets are writers of exactitude and detail whose purpose is to produce work that is accurate and strictly 'didactic', and whose interest in their subject matter is adequate to sustain years of work on a single poem: but their style is not hexameter epic by accident, however - the form of epic verse imparts a degree of grandeur and affords access to the traditional divine machinery and sublimity of style of epic. More importantly, however,

⁸⁴ on this see Gale (1994) 99-106

⁸⁵ for death levelling high and low cf. *Lucr.* 3. 1025-1052

the choice of epic allows them to parade *authority* as poets. They, like the epic poet, claim to be informed and to speak with authority on their subject matter - and for that purpose the more recondite the subject, the better. It is no great gift to speak with authority on matters of common knowledge; so they show evidence of rare and unobtainable knowledge to back up their claim to be inspired by the Muses, just as the epic poet is inspired with knowledge of the unknowable past (or future), the gods or the world of mythology. Nobody can 'see' the dead heroes of Troy in Homer, the legends behind the astronomical phenomena in Aratus or the births of the gods in Hesiod: here the poet's claim to be inspired is his guarantee of veracity, as has been often pointed out⁸⁶, and shows the link between poetry and prophecy so often mentioned in the ancient world: the adoption of the epic high style by didactic poets arrogates this authority of the inspired poet to a range of subject matter some of which is the result not of special insight afforded by the Muses but by the metaphrastic expounding of scientific data collected by simple sense-experience (Nicander's snakes, most obviously). In this way Lucretius has the best of both worlds: he uses the language of divine inspiration and a vision afforded by divinity (e.g. 6. 92-5) in his high epic style, but at the same time persuades the reader by frequent appeals to common sense not to trust the gods for guidance or fear their wrath: his paradoxical claim is that this recondite world of invisible atoms and telescopic phenomena is available to the naked eye (*nonne vides?*), just as his recondite 'divine' world of epic poetry conveys a vision of the

world where the divine and the human do not interact at all. This marks him out as different from the tradition and as engaging in its development; the poet is engaging in a dialogue or dialectic with himself, whereby the clash of epic 'divine' form and mundane content is itself expressive of the effort needed to enlighten the reader - the reader needs the enticement of poetry while he is still unenlightened, but will continue to enjoy the pleasure of this mode of expression even when it has served its purpose by persuading him of the content. As demonstration of this, see e.g. the argumentation of 2. 552-568 (where an atomic proposition about the infinite numbers of any one variety of atomic shape is demonstrated by a simile of a shipwreck which blends into a warning not to seek wealth by travelling on the sea; physics is brought to life by epic style and given an appropriately focalised 'ethical' turn): or look at 3.978-1052, where the epic tales of punishment in the Underworld are told in epic style with heavy irony: their idiocy is brought home as much by the style as by the sense of the words, and yet the poet will not jettison the authority which epic poets have and transforms the inadequate epic myths into sermons on ethical themes for his readers, whereby the sinners in Hades become, as we saw in chapter one, types of foolish behaviour here on earth.

Secondly, didactic poets are also aesthetic poets whose poetry is there to make the reader feel the tangible sensations being described - the priority of *enargeia* is important here as the experience is being

mediated indirectly through the art form but the feeling is as if one were there (cf. Homer *Odyssey* 8. 499-530, where the singing of the tale of Troy produces real tears in Odysseus who is then compared to a woman victim of war in a simile). In one obvious manner, Lucretius goes further than the others in the metapoetic manner in which he uses language as both a medium of didactic instruction, a simile for the atoms themselves (1.196-7, 823-7, 912-14, 2.688-94, 1013-8) and even a subject of its own discourse (5.1028-1090 on the origin of language).

Thirdly, ethics is clearly a priority. Hesiod, Lucretius and Vergil all aim in some ways to change the way we live rather than simply expanding the sum of our knowledge. Is this proof of the power of poetry - the poet is inspired with sure knowledge of the unknowable and so we should listen to him in all things? The belief in the moral power of the poet is as old as Homer - remember how Agamemnon left a poet with his wife to keep her chaste while he went to Troy (*Odyssey* 3. 267-9). Again, Lucretius goes further; not just advice on farming and the appeal of the country life (and note how some scholars⁸⁷ now see the *Georgics* as synecdochic to make up for this apparent limitation) but rather a whole world-view involving the life and death of all living things and the universe itself. Lucretius makes pretty massive claims when compared to other didactic poets. The fact that the ethical emotions in Lucretius (unlike in Hesiod, Aratus) are usually negative (against love, politics, religion) whereas the metaphysical and epistemological conclusions are as positive and

immutable as the atoms themselves has the effect of leaving the residual charge of the poem as aesthetic in the sense of elevating sensory values of pleasure in the world and the poem over any other means to secure happiness; which is one sense in which aesthetics become ethics in the text of this poem.

To return to the programmatic passage which opens book 4⁸⁸: the last word is clearly significant: *utilis* is a key word in the justification of didactic poetry, the ideal being the blend of *utile* and *dulce* in one text⁸⁹, just as the reader of the *de rerum natura* will experience the *utilitatem* in a text composed *suaviloquenti...carmine*. This lets us reach the unexciting conclusion that the text is firmly in the tradition of didactic poetry as described above which conveys 'useful' information in a poetic⁹⁰ form but which may - or may not - place poetry higher on the agenda of importance than the science as is commonly alleged of the so-called 'metaphrasts'; a topic examined on pages 13-15 above. This thesis wishes to urge rather more than this, however. Lucretius applies all the above elements of the didactic tradition but also extends it in many ways. He is, for example, not without a sense of irony. He is a poet who refers more than anyone

87 e.g. Lyne (1993) 203

88 4.1-25

89 Horace *Ars Poetica* 343

else to himself as writing a poem; he is his own protagonist. It was quite normal to end a book (say) with a *sphragis* signing off, or a personal closure⁹¹ - but Lucretius puts himself as the hero of his own experiments (e.g. 6. 1044: he does this so often that Wiseman⁹² inferred the poet's whole life and hobbies from the poem) as well as claiming the crown of glory (4.1-25) and chiding the reader, of whom we see more than we do of Perses or Maecenas (albeit he fades as the poem proceeds⁹³); rather than a bland treatise, we have here almost a record of a drama acted out. Hesiod and Vergil do not address the reader *in propria persona* so much. The central 'hero' of the poem is Epicurus: but the poet keeps putting himself between the audience and the stage and reminding us of his genius. The poet is more than Vergil to our Dante - he is teacher and example to the reader, proof of the ethical conclusions towards which the text is driving - namely that the true Epicurean can both see the world in its real colours without flinching from the pain there but can also see the world in its beauty and thus derive aesthetic pleasure which alone is worth deriving. The poem is thus both argument and conclusion, embodying its own answers in the fact of the text itself. The way of life of the Epicurean poet is being elevated to the status of the highest ethical value; and the pleasure of poetry and the pleasure of learning the truth about the world combine to secure the poet the glory he seeks.

⁹⁰ or at least verse: cf. Aristotle's strictures on the poetry of Empedocles in *Poetics* 1447b17-20

⁹¹ e.g. the endings of Vergil's *Georgics*, Horace *Odes* 3.30

⁹² Wiseman (1974)

⁹³ G.B. Townend (1978) 267-83

The ironic and self-referential posture of the poet is well seen in the medical analogy which opens book 4. The analogy with the medicine given to the sick child is however seriously misunderstood if we do not recognise that this poetry (unlike the medicine) is - to continue the metaphor - in a bottle clearly marked poetry. The child would not drink the medicine if it knew that it was drinking medicine - and similarly Lucretius ought not to tell us what he is doing if his purpose is really to 'trick' us, as the child is fooled by the yellow honey. The poetry does show the true pleasure of the world: but the poet's comparison with the doctor is ironic and distancing. Insofar as mankind needs the enlightenment of Epicurus, the poet is the doctor administering to us what we need - and the unenlightened are frequently compared with children afraid of the dark⁹⁴. Poetry is a way of writing which will render *ratio* more entertaining, and so (we are told) is employed for that reason. The poetry is, however, clearly more than just the honey to achieve this: it does not point away from itself towards a greater good but rather it embodies and preserves the good in the aesthetic pleasure which is the chief route to happiness for the wise man. The child needed to be tricked with a deceptive appearance: the whole thrust of this poem is that such deceptive appearances are to be seen through and discarded in favour of the reality which is staring us in the face. If the poetry is itself part of the deception, it too will have to be discarded - but this poetry presents us with truth rather than deceit and thus breaks free of the medical analogy so artfully set up by the poet. The layers of irony become ever more

baffling - but once again the poet creates his own material in that the reader reads the medical analogy with its talk of tricking the child and sees through it - unlike the child - to a state of health which is conveyed and embodied in the aesthetic pleasure of contemplating the superiority of himself over others: in this case that of the adult over the child, elsewhere⁹⁵ of the wise man on land over others on the sea. The act of seeing this - through the poetry - is itself the goal towards which the poem is directed, the poem being thus its own end as well as both a receptacle for the aesthetic pleasure and the means towards it. One might have expected the poetry to be simply the cosmetic packaging to contain what the reader 'really' wants (i.e. truth): in fact, the situation is a great deal more complex as the text is itself a way of seeing, an aesthetic experience of the kind which the poet enjoins as our ethical ideal. Far from being discarded as redundant once the wisdom has been absorbed, this poem reveals itself increasingly as more than 'just' the honey on the medicine to sell philosophy to the immature; it is also the state of health being looked for.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE ETHICS OF DISENGAGEMENT

So far this thesis has examined the ethical teachings in the text and found them small in contrast to the weight of the science; I have argued that the ethical teaching is dependent on a positivist view of morals such that normative ethical statements may be proven by reference to the empirical facts of nature and human nature; and that the Epicurean concept of pleasure allows for a definition of aesthetic pleasure which would 'justify' the poem both in the quantity of pleasant knowledge being conveyed and also in the pleasure of the poetic style adopted to express it. One key passage on ethics in the poem remains to be examined - a passage which in many ways is the most explicitly ethical in the whole poem.

The classic statement of Epicurean ethical 'wisdom' in Lucretius is the beginning of book 2, where the poet urges that it is pleasant and wise to watch the spectacle of other men suffering in battle or on the sea, when one has no personal part in the struggle. The poet's ethical stance is thus one of aesthetic distance from life, a detached disengagement which renders life like a theatre show.

suave, mari magno turbantibus aequora ventis,
e terra magnum alterius spectare laborem;
non quia vexari quemquamst iucunda voluptas,
sed quibus ipsa malis careas quia cernere suave est.
suave etiam belli certamina magna tueri
per campos instructa tua sine parte pericli.
sed nil dulcius est bene quam munita tenere

edita doctrina sapientum templa serena, despicere unde queas alios passimque videre errare atque viam palantis quaerere vitae, certare ingenio, contendere nobilitate, noctes atque dies niti praestante labore ad summas emergere opes rerumque potiri.	10
o miseras hominum mentes! o pectora caeca! qualibus in tenebris vitae quantisque periclis degitur hoc aevi quodcumque est! nonne videre nil aliud sibi naturam latrare, nisi utqui corpore seiunctus dolor absit, mensque fruatur iucundo sensu cura semota metuque?	15
ergo corpoream ad naturam pauca videmus esse opus omnino, quae demant cumque dolorem, delicias quoque uti multas substernere possint; gratius interdum neque natura ipsa requirit, si non aurea sunt iuvenum simulacra per aedes lampadas igniferas manibus retinentia dextris, lumina nocturnis epulis ut suppeditentur, nec domus argento fulget auroque renidet nec citharae reboant laqueata aurataque templa, cum tamen inter se prostrati in gramine molli propter aquae rivum sub ramis arboris altae non magnis opibus iucunde corpora curant, praesertim cum tempestas adridet et anni tempora conspergunt viridantis floribus herbas. nec calidae citius decedunt corpore febres, textilibus si in picturis ostroque rubenti iacteris, quam si in plebeia veste cubandum est.	20
	25
	30
	35
quapropter quoniam nil nostro in corpore gazae proficiunt neque nobilitas nec gloria regni, quod superest, animo quoque nil prodesse putandum: si non forte, tuas legiones per loca campi fervere cum videas belli simulacra cientis, subsidiis magnis et equum vi constabilitas, ornatas armis pariter pariterque animatas, his tibi tum rebus timefactae religiones effugiunt animo pavidae, mortisque timores tum vacuum pectus linquunt curaque solutum. quod si ridicula haec ludibriaque esse videmus re veraque metus hominum curaeque sequaces nec metuunt sonitus armorum nec fera tela audacterque inter reges rerumque potentis versantur neque fulgorem reverentur ab auro nec clarum vestis splendorem purpureai, quid dubitas quin omni' sit haec rationi' potestas, omnis cum in tenebris praesertim vita laboret? nam veluti pueri trepidant atque omnia caecis	40
	45
	50
	55

in tenebris metuunt, sic nos in luce timemus
interdum nilo quae sunt metuenda magis quam
quae pueri in tenebris pavitant finguntque futura.
hunc igitur terrorem animi tenebrasque necessest
non radii solis neque lucida tela diei
discutiant, sed naturae species ratioque¹

60

Lucretius is here giving the highest approval to those activities to which the labels *suave* and *voluptas* can be attached. The pleasure here is analysed as follows:

1) 1-19 Personal pleasure is found in watching the sufferings and toils of others from a safe contemplative distance and seeing that such striving is quite unnecessary.

2) 20-36 Luxury is no benefit to the body; and nature provides what we need free of all effort

3) 37-61 The mind also does not need luxuries, and the show of military power does not succeed in ridding us of unhealthy fears which themselves fear no show of might; only philosophy can rid us of these.

The priamel structure of the opening lines (*suave...suave...sed nil dulcius*) suggests that the third option is the most favoured of three different options, when it is in fact simply an extension and an expression of the previous two. The specific 'epic' troubles of sea-storm² and battlefield³ are focalised into a sharper picture of philosophical and ethical storm and battlefield to be avoided. Nor is the poet being simply metaphorical; on the contrary, specific images

¹ 2. 1-61

² a familiar theme of epic poetry: see Gale (1994) 119-121, Hardie (1986) 201

of isolated incidents are widened to refer to a whole way of life (*viam..vitae*). In all three cases, the verbs are ones of looking (*spectare... cernere... tueri... despicere... videre*) and the pleasure is therefore primarily aesthetic and contemplative. '*spectare* is to watch a *spectaculum*'⁴ The spectacle is literary and theatrical in form and also in content, in that the battles and the storms are the stuff of heroic epic action which poets use to provide pleasure for their audience. Notice here the use of epic language to recreate the epic struggles of weather (*mari magno turbantibus aequora ventis*) and of battle (*belli certamina*), both phrases slightly parodistic in view of the dismissal of these struggles as being beneath the wise man, whose life is shored up in the safe haven of learning (*doctrina*) and peace (*serena*). From here he can look down (*desplicere*) and see (*videre*) other people everywhere (*passim*) straying and wandering (notice how the futility is brought out in the reduplicated *errare...palantis*) in search of a way of life, in implicit contrast to his own safely discovered and fixed abode. Their foolish wandering is sharpened to a political sketch (*nobilitate...ad summas emergere opes rerumque potiri*) of endeavour which is earnest but inane (note again the reduplicated verbs *certare... contendere ... niti*), all in order to gain *opes* and *rerum*. This last word is of course highly ironic and satirical: the poem is on the nature of *rerum* and it teaches us that real *res* are all around us and can be manipulated and understood by anybody, however ignoble or poor,

³ an obvious epic theme from the *Iliad* onwards

⁴ Fowler (1983) 29 citing NH ad Horace *Odes* 1.28.17

once their *natura*⁵ (and especially human nature⁶) are grasped. The poet then (continuing the theme of the need for correct perception) apostrophises wretched mortals for their blindness (*caeca... tenebris... nonne videre*) and presents the Epicurean recipe for happiness - freedom from physical pain and pleasant sensation (*iucundo sensu*) recalling the first word of the passage (*suave*) with neat ring-composition. The austerity of the Epicurean is then explained in greater detail (20-36) with further satire of the striving after riches, the argument being simply that such luxury cannot add to the pleasure sought, because once the pain of want has been stilled pleasure cannot be increased but only varied⁷, and any means will suffice to still the need in the first place, the quicker and easier the better - *parvum quod satis est* - a philosophy applied to early man's enjoyment of food in the springtime of human history⁸ and to sexual pleasure also⁹. The enjoyment of physical pleasure is accepted, but the prime purpose of philosophy as a way of life is to banish fears and mental pain: the poet mocks the folly of relying on political and military power to rid us of fear (37-54): here again there is ample parody of the epic conventions which deceive the fool into his folly: *belli certamina*, the legions being shored up with the Ennian *equum vi*¹⁰, the serried ranks evoked by the repeated *pariter*, and the nice irony whereby the enemies which flee in panic are here the fears themselves - except that these legions do

⁵ 1. 75-7

⁶ 2. 20-36

⁷ *Ep. Men.* 30-1, *K.D.* 3, 18, Cicero *de finibus* 1.38, Gosling and Taylor (1982) 377-383

⁸ 5. 932-942

not in fact rout the terrors, whose fear is reinforced by the repetition *timefactae... pavidae... timores*. Military power is rendered two-dimensional and insubstantial as it succeeds only in arousing the *belli simulacra* - especially appropriate in this case as the 'fighting' is sham battles taking place probably in the Campus Martius¹¹ - and the self-deceit is also perhaps contained in the synaesthetic *fervere videas* as in the telling epithet *armis ornatas* (the arms are mere decoration). A similar figure is used later by Horace:

dant alios Furiae torvo spectacula Marti;
exitio est avidum mare nautis¹²

'The Romans sometimes likened great military exploits, particularly those of the civil war, to the contests of the arena, where the vilest slaves were butchered for the pleasure of a sadistic proletariat. The point was made by the unenchanted Caelius, Cicero *Epist.* 8.14.4. (50 B.C.): "uterque et animo et copiis paratus. si sine tuo periculo fieri posset, magnum et iucundum tibi Fortuna spectaculum parabat."¹³ The sham fighting does not rout the real enemies of fear and care and the show is a farce - *ridicula.. ludibriaque* (47). The word *ludibrium* is perfect: compare the passage in Livy where the pretend battle is contrasted with the real thing:

⁹ 5. 962-965: cf. 4. 1063-1072, Horace *Satires* 1.2.111-119
¹⁰ Munro's emendation of the mss *epicuri*: cf. Ennius *Ann* 161, 412
¹¹ as suggested by Bailey
¹² Horace *Odes* 1.28.17-18
¹³ Nisbet and Hubbard (1970) 330

*amoto...inani ludibrio, tum demum ad iustum
proelium ...concursum est*¹⁴

and Martial's mocking reference to *miserae ludibria chartae*¹⁵ by which he means 'poems not based on real experience'¹⁶. The fears themselves, personified, walk tall among even the grandees of this world (*reges rerumque potentes*) and have no respect at all for the appearances of power and wealth which they display (52). The title *rerum..potentes* is of course bitterly ironic in the context of the empty show of power over *res* when (again) real *res* are all around us for the taking. The poet thus uses poetry to undermine the very tone he is setting up, using epic language to debunk the epic way of life in a self-exploding passage of deep irony.

The moral tone in this passage is apparently one simply of enlightened self-interest and disillusion with the conventional icons of success and happiness, such as the proverbial ἄδικος εὐδαίμων tyrant figure found in (e.g.) Plato *Gorgias*¹⁷; the rich and powerful are not for that reason happy, while the poor and powerless may be happy with the aid of reason. The world is not a perfect place, but we can all be happy in it. The philosopher will not take part in politics as the bear-garden of politics is too rough and dangerous for peace of mind and he

¹⁴ Livy 37.41.12

¹⁵ Martial 10.4.7

¹⁶ OLD s.v. 'ludibrium' 4

¹⁷ 470c9-471d2

can (and should) shelter from the storm, as suggested by Socrates in Plato's *Republic*¹⁸:

ταῦτα πάντα λογισμῷ λαβὼν, ἡσυχίαν ἔχων καὶ τὰ αὐτοῦ πράττων, οἷον ἐν χειμῶνι κονιορτοῦ καὶ ζάλης ὑπὸ πνεύματος φερομένου ὑπὸ τειχίον ἀποστάς, ὁρῶν τοὺς ἄλλους καταπιμπλαμένους ἀνομίας, ἀγαπᾷ εἴ πη αὐτὸς καθαρὸς ἀδικίας τε καὶ ἀνοσίων ἔργων τόν τε ἐνθάδε βίον βιώσεται καὶ τὴν ἀπαλλαγὴν αὐτοῦ μετὰ καλῆς ἐλπίδος ἴλεως τε καὶ εὐμενῆς ἀπαλλάσσεται.

Where Lucretius goes further than Socrates is in his suggestion that the politically powerful are in fact weaker than the non-political sage; the passage is thus in 'political' terms something of an exercise in turning the tables on the powerful of the world, whereby their show of power - notice for instance how the legions evoke only the *simulacra* of war (41), a remark justifiable in Epicureanism but here of obvious satirical force - is a mere show with no substance while the reality behind the façade is one of fear and impotence in the face of nature, death, religion and so on, a situation later memorably described by Horace¹⁹. The rich and powerful are theatrical in their elaborate costume and decor - notice how the poet treats us to a lavish verbal description of the luxurious house redolent of Homer's palace on Scheria²⁰ - and yet behind the costumes they are as weak as the rest of us, their costumes a mere façade of empty appearance. When a rich man and a poor man are sick, the expensive bedclothes of the former give him no advantage over the latter²¹, whereas the wise man is

18 Plato *Republic* 496d
 19 Horace *Odes* 3.1.34-40
 20 *Odyssey* 7. 100-102
 21 2. 34-36

always superior to the fool in being free from the mental pains of fear and superstition. Once again there is theatrical irony here: the wise man is the audience who sees the spectacle enacted by the fools and derives safe aesthetic pleasure from the displayed actions, while being aware that the spectacle is in fact no more than an empty show of inane fatuity. The fool, on the other hand, is in fact on the stage acting out a futile role but believes that he is 'really' pursuing pleasure and happiness in his quest for power and wealth: he is an actor unaware of his role. The wise man does not enjoy the suffering of the fool because he likes people to be hurt - why, in that case, would the poem affect to convert the fools to a happier state of mind if by doing so it would reduce the amount of folly available for our entertainment? Rather the poem presents the inescapable fact of the contrast between wisdom and folly, between action and contemplation, between sure aesthetic pleasure and futile seeking after pleasure through power and greed.

The passage has often been seen as ethically and morally somewhat distasteful. Bailey concedes that the lines 'have an unpleasant taste of egoism and even of cruelty. The Epicurean philosopher, secure in his own independence, gazing on the troubles and struggles of his fellow-men is an almost cynical picture; Bacon referred to it ironically as "Lucretian pleasure".²² The prevailing attitude appears egotistical and it is hard to defend Lucretius against this charge by any other means. Nor can we excuse the poet on the

grounds that these are post-Christian sensitivities not shared by the ancients: Aristotle regards ἐπιχαιρεκακία as an unmitigated evil which does not allow of a 'golden mean'²³ and links it with adultery, theft and murder.

This is, it might be urged, to misunderstand the literary tradition in which this passage is composed. In the first place it is one of respectable atomist ancestry: the atomist philosopher Democritus expresses a very similar view when he says:²⁴

ἐπὶ τοῖς δυνατοῖς οὖν δεῖ ἔχειν τὴν γνώμην καὶ τοῖς παρεούσιν ἀρκέεσθαι, τῶν μὲν ζηλουμένων καὶ θαυματομένων ὀλίγην μνήμην ἔχοντα καὶ τῇ διανοίᾳ μὴ προσεδρεύοντα, τῶν δὲ ταλαιπωρεόντων τοὺς βίους θεωρεῖν ἐννοούμενον ἃ πάσχουσι κάρτα, ὅπως ἂν τὰ παρεόντα σοι καὶ ὑπάρχοντα μεγάλα καὶ ζηλωτὰ φαίνεται, καὶ μηκέτι πλειόνων ἐπιθυμέοντι συμβαίνει κακοπαθεῖν τῇ ψυχῇ. ὁ γὰρ θαυμάζων τοὺς ἔχοντας καὶ μακαριζομένους ὑπὸ τῶν ἄλλων ἀνθρώπων καὶ τῇ μνήμῃ πᾶσαν ὥραν προσεδρεύων ἀεὶ ἐπικαινουργεῖν ἀναγκάζεται καὶ ἐπιβάλλεσθαι δι' ἐπιθυμίην τοῦ τι πρήσσειν ἀνήκεστον ὧν νόμοι κωλύουσιν. διόπερ τὰ μὲν μὴ δίξεσθαι χρεῶν, ἐπὶ δὲ τοῖς εὐθυμέεσθαι χρεῶν, παραβάλλοντα τὸν ἑαυτοῦ βίον πρὸς τὸν τῶν φαυλότερον πρησσόντων, καὶ μακαρίζειν ἑαυτὸν ἐνθυμούμενον ἃ πάσχουσιν, ὁκόσῳ αὐτέων βέλτιον πρήσσει τε καὶ διάγει· ταύτης γὰρ ἐχόμενος τῆς γνώμης εὐθυμότερόν τε διάξεις καὶ οὐκ ὀλίγας κήρας ἐν τῷ βίῳ διώσει, φθόνον καὶ ζῆλον καὶ δυσμενίην.

Democritus is perhaps not the philosopher whom many would choose as their model:

'Democritus' hedonism has nothing to do with morality; it does not pretend to tell us what, morally speaking, we ought to do, or how to live the moral life. It is a recipe for happiness or contentment, not a prescription for goodness; the system sets up a selfish end for the

²² Bailey (1947) vol ii p.797

²³ *Nicomachean Ethics* 1107a10

individual and counsels him on how to attain it: it does not set up a moral goal and advise on its achievement.'²⁵

This 'systematic theory of prudence'²⁶ is of course exactly what one expects from a positivist atomist philosopher whose moral theory rests on his system of materialistic physics, and Barnes' dismissal of the connections between the physics and the ethics of Democritus as 'empty: it follows a will o' the wisp'²⁷ is unfair to the atomist thinker whose theory of (apparent) moral nihilism is no less a theory for all that. The urge towards *Schadenfreude* is perhaps not one which people would readily admit to: but for Epicurus there is no court of appeal beyond the provision of pleasure to the individual: 'strictly speaking there is no concept of moral obligation or of moral evil in Epicureanism'²⁸ and so the primacy of pleasure justifies the laughter for the Epicurean without any further ado. There is inevitably an element of such superiority in any philosophical or religious system which promises to elevate the wise man or the initiated above his peers into the realms of blessedness, and Lucretius is simply (in this, as in much else) being more honest about it.

There are then other distinguished ancients who subscribe to Lucretius' enjoyment of others' suffering: Fowler²⁹ cites the Greek proverb ἐξάντης λεύσσω τοῦμον κακὸν ἄλλον ἔχοντα, and Cicero

²⁴ fr. 191 (KRS 594): the parallel is not noted in Bailey

²⁵ Barnes (1982) 533

²⁶ *ibid.*

²⁷ Barnes (1982) 534

is explicit and interesting on the whole topic in seeking Lucceius' favourable report of his political career:

multam enim casus nostri tibi varietatem in scribendo suppeditabunt, plenam cuiusdam voluptatis, quae vehementer animos hominum in legendo te scriptore tenere possit. nihil est enim aptius ad delectationem lectoris, quam temporum varietates fortunaque vicissitudines; quae etsi nobis optabiles in experiendo non fuerunt, in legendo tamen erunt iucundae. habet enim praeteriti doloris segura recordatio delectationem. ceteris vero, nulla perfunctis propria molestia, casus autem alienos sine ullo dolore intuentibus, etiam ipsa misericordia est iucunda. quem enim nostrum ille moriens apud Mantineam Epaminondas non cum quadam miseratione delectat? qui tum denique sibi avelli iubet spiculum, posteaquam ei percontanti dictum est clipeum esse salvum; ut etiam in vulneris dolore aequo animo cum laude moreretur. cuius studium in legendo non erectum Themistocli fuga redituque tenetur? Etenim ordo ipse annalium mediocriter nos retinet, quasi enumeratione fastorum. at viri saepe excellentis ancipites variique casus habent admirationem, expectationem, laetitiam, molestiam, spem, timorem; si vero exitu notabili concluduntur, expletur animus iucundissima lectionis voluptate.³⁰

Later on, in the depths of disillusion with politics, he expresses similar sentiments again:

iam pridem gubernare me taedebat etiam cum licebat; nunc vero, cum cogar exire de navi non abiectis sed ereptis gubernaculis, cupio istorum naufragia ex terra intueri, cupio, ut ait tuus amicus Sophocles, κἄν ὑπὸ στέγῃ
πικνῆς ἀκούειν ψακάδος εὐδούσῃ φρενί.³¹

The Sophoclean quotation runs in full:

φεῦ φεῦ τί τούτου χάρμα μείζον ἂν λάβοις
 τοῦ γῆς ἐπιψάσαντα κἄθ' ὑπὸ στέγῃ
 πικνῆς ἀκούσαι ψακάδος εὐδούσῃ φρενί;³²

²⁸ Rist (1972) 125

²⁹ Fowler (1983) 17

³⁰ Cicero *Ad Fam.* 5.12. 4-5

³¹ Cicero *Ad Atticum* 2.7.4

Shackleton-Bailey³³ cites some interesting Epicurean lines from Tibullus:

parva seges satis est; satis est, requiescere lecto
 si licet et solito membra levare toro.
 quam iuvat immites ventos audire cubantem
 et dominam tenero continuisse sinu
 aut, gelidas hibernus aquas cum fuderit Auster
 securum somnos imbre iuvante sequi.³⁴

These last lines put the Lucretian passage into the more familiar setting of the Epicurean choosing the life of quiet pleasure rather than that of noise and fame or ruin³⁵. The choice is after all open to all to be either a risk-taking politician or a quietist - but it is a typical stance of the poet to choose the latter in the increasingly common 'choice of life' poems³⁶ which seek to justify the choice of apolitical poetry rather than pursue the life of the politician, the soldier or the merchant. Parallels abound in Roman literature: from the first poem in Horace's *Odes* to the explicitly autobiographical account by Ovid of his early life:

frater ad eloquium viridi tendebat ab aevo
 fortia verbosi natus ad arma fori;
 at mihi iam puero caelestia sacra placebant,
 inque suum furtim Musa trahebat opus.
 saepe pater dixit 'studium quid inutile temptas?
 Maeonides nullas ipse reliquit opes.'....
 cepimus et tenerae primos aetatis honores,
 eque viris quondam pars tribus una fui.
 curia restabat: clavi mensura coacta est;
 maius erat nostris viribus illud onus.
 nec patiens corpus, nec mens fuit apta labori,
 sollicitaeque fugax ambitionis eram,
 et petere Aoniae suadebant tuta sorores
 otia, iudicio semper amata meo.³⁷

32 from Sophocles *Tympanistae* fr. 636 Pearson

33 Shackleton Bailey (1965) 367

34 Tibullus 1.1.42-8

35 cf. (*inter multa alia*) Horace *Odes* 1.9, *Satires* 1.6, *Epistles* 1.7, 1.10 and the whole Epicurean theme of *ἀσθε βιώσας*.

36 cf. e.g. Horace *Odes* 1.1 with parallels cited by NH ad loc., Cairns (1979) 145-6

37 Ovid *Tristia* 4.10. 17-40

where the familiar dichotomy of politics and poetry is expressed in peculiarly Roman terms. Vergil expresses the concept also in the *Georgics*, where he describes himself in the closing *sphragis* as:

illo Vergilium me tempore dulcis alebat
Parthenope studiis florentem ignobilis otii,
carmina qui lusi pastorum...³⁸

recalling his earlier wish *flumina amem silvasque inglorius*³⁹ but adding the two important ideas of *otium* and *lusus*. In other words, it may be that, if Lucretius appears to be revelling in others' misfortune, he is only doing so to justify his own choice of life as a 'quietist' poet and philosopher: the traditional opposition between poetry and philosophy here gives way to a dichotomy between politics on the one hand and poetry/philosophy on the other, with the philosophical poet espousing a stance which combines the 'childlike' unpolitical nature of a Socrates being taunted by a Calicles with the *otiosus* attitude of a gentleman of letters. Put like this, the *Schadenfreude* of Lucretius becomes a sort of inverted *μακαρισμός* elevating the chosen way of life by invidious contrast with other possibilities: this particular *topos* finds examples throughout classical literature⁴⁰, particularly elevating pastoral⁴¹ contentment against the noise of the city, but this is the only example I know of where the favoured 'profession' consists simply in the watching of the others all going wrong.

³⁸ Vergil *Georgics* 4. 563-5

³⁹ Vergil *Georgics* 2. 486

⁴⁰ e.g. Vergil *Georgics* 2. 458-74, Claudian *Carminum Minorum Corpusculum* 20; the genre is mocked in Horace *Epode* 2. More references given in Nisbet and Hubbard (1970) 177.

⁴¹ For Lucretius' use of pastoral see Gillis (1967)

There is thus more to the present passage than a mere *μακαρισμός*, inverted or not; some positive pleasure is being assigned to the contemplation of the lack of real pleasure suffered by others, rather than simply using their displeasure as evidence of the poet's superiority. The *Schadenfreude* of the opening lines gives way, as we saw, to a disquisition on the true nature of pleasure as being the removal of pain and the avoidance of luxury; and the poet ties the two together by asserting that pleasure is simply:

corpore seiunctus dolor absit, mensque fruatur
iucundo sensu cura semota metuque⁴²

which allows for the aesthetic pleasure of watching other men suffer as being literally the enjoyment of a pleasant sensation freed from care and fear.

The alternatives are not exhausted, however. It might still, for instance, be urged that the pleasure described here is simply that satisfaction gained by having chosen the better way of life, the mood found in, for instance, Catullus' sardonic lines:

siqua recordanti benefacta priora voluptas
est homini, cum se cogitat esse pium,
nec sanctam violasse fidem, nec foedere in ullo
divum ad fallendos numine abusum homines,
multa parata manent in longa aetate, Catulle
ex hoc ingrato gaudia amore tibi.⁴³

⁴² 2. 18-19

⁴³ 76. 1-6

Here, after all, is that Epicurean word *voluptas* used of the recollection of good living in implicit contrast to the bad ways of others. The difference however is instructive: Lucretius' wise man is looking at the behaviour of others, whereas Catullus is examining his own past life. Catullus is analysing his own self-denial and righteous morality - with the implicit expectation that such virtue will be rewarded - only to find that he has lost out on all sides. His lover has not requited his love, his good acts are simply a waste of effort if their aim was to secure either that love or indeed happiness, since his state of mind is a very un-Epicurean sickness (*pestem...morbum*) and even self-torture (*te...excrucies*) - exactly the kind of love-sickness in fact, which Lucretius goes out of his way to castigate in 4.1068-1120. Catullus has tried virtue in the spirit of self-denial, rejecting his instincts towards selfish pleasure at the expense of others and hoping for recognition, and found the process unrewarding - the implication behind his words is that he should have been as bad as the rest and sought pleasure through immorality. Lucretius' wise man, by contrast, finds virtue in the actual seeking of pleasure and avoidance of pain: he knows what is going to make him happy and sees through the fatuous ambitions of the sailor and the soldier to the peaceful calm of wisdom.

What makes the Lucretius passage central for this thesis is the further suggestion in it that pleasure resides in the act of seeing itself, in the unmoved contemplation of movement, in the passion-free contemplation of passion; in short, in an aesthetic attitude. The alternative would be to read the text as heartless cruelty and wilful enjoyment of others' pain. Critics who take exception to the apparent cruelty of the passage themselves no doubt go

to the theatre and witness the frisson of pleasure gained by watching tragedy without feeling guilty of the same callous enjoyment as the poet here espouses - and the key to the understanding of the passage is, I suggest, precisely this 'theatrical' context. In the next three chapters we shall look at the theatricality of the *De Rerum Natura*: suffice it to say here that the attitude is one of contemplation rather than action, of watching others act while remaining inactive, and (above all) of deriving aesthetic pleasure (*suave...iucunda voluptas...suave*) from the act of so watching. We are told by Epicurus *λάθε βιώσας*, we are told by Lucretius to avoid political activity⁴⁴ and the pursuit of love, to avoid warfare and superstition (all of them different forms of seeking power over others and the world, of *rerum potiri*): only here are we given the complementary message which breathes through every line of the poem - true happiness (and pleasure and power) is to be gained by the aesthetic understanding and appreciation of the world all around us. This is an aesthetic ethical philosophy which tells us that we *ought* to spend our lives in looking at and appreciating the world as perceived through the senses rather than in seeking to possess it. If the goal of Epicurean philosophy is freedom from pain and fear and serene contentment, then the person who wishes to be happy has to spend his time studying the truth about the world in order to replace superstitious fear with *vera ratio*: and also to cultivate those forms of pleasure which will bring happiness, most notably the *ataraxia* of mental pleasure. The search for scientific knowledge is obviously a prolegomena to such ethics, and the poem is both a

⁴⁴ on this topic, and especially the Epicurean stance towards kingship, see D.P. Fowler (1989b)

testament to this search and also an example of it; but the other part of the ethic is the stilling of the body towards the contemplation of movement outside itself in aesthetic appreciation, appreciation even of the pain in the world. Knowledge may bring pleasure, and pleasure is the good: therefore knowledge is also productive of good and aesthetics becomes ethics.

Seeing the truth of nature makes men like gods and thus grants them the sort of blissful contentment which the gods enjoy⁴⁵; one recalls how the gods in Homer watch the human activities on the battlefield with interest and pleasure but not without some degree of personal involvement and even pain, as Zeus weeps over Sarpedon⁴⁶ and Aphrodite is wounded by Diomedes⁴⁷, whereas the gods in the *de rerum natura* are safely distanced from any involvement⁴⁸. The poet thus has it both ways - the 'real' gods are not available to help or punish us, but he is prepared to borrow the language of Homeric gods to produce a paradigm of the perfect human life as one of safe contemplation of the world of restless human activity. This point will be examined further in the last chapter. Before then, the poet's use of the theatre will demonstrate the way this aesthetic ethics of disengagement is put to literary and also philosophical use.

⁴⁵ such as is enjoyed by Epicurus: see the conclusion to the thesis

⁴⁶ *Iliad* 16. 459-61

⁴⁷ *Iliad* 5.334-342

⁴⁸ 3.14-24

CHAPTER FIVE

THE THEATRE AS SIMILE, INTERTEXT AND POETIC MEDIUM

Of all the literary debts which Lucretius clearly owes, none is more important for this thesis than his debt to the theatre, and this and the following two chapters will attempt to unpack the importance of the theatre in its different facets.

The theatre is used as a microcosmic analogy of perception at work in 'real life' as we take in *simulacra* and interpret them as being 'true' objects when they are only fleeting images; it is in the theatre that human experience is acted out and presented to the audience in a direct and moving manner; it is the theatre which shows how didactic issues can be addressed without overt didacticism in an aesthetic and demonstrative way, using rhetoric and action to convey a view of the world which is plausible, moving and therefore convincing; it is in the theatre above all that scene painting can be achieved by the use of words alone, a technique essential in a theatrical tradition with little in the way of scenery. If Lucretius chose to use the theatre as both metaphor, analogy and inspiration for his poetry, then, that is hardly surprising.

There is, to begin with, a good deal of direct mention of the theatre as an institution, with Lucretius using his first-hand knowledge of the theatrical experience. He uses the theatre of Pompey as an

image several times, such as when he uses the rattling of theatrical awnings as a simile for the rattle of thunder:

dant etiam sonitum patuli super aequora mundi,
 carbasus ut quondam magnis intenta theatris
 dat crepitum malos inter iactata trabesque,
 interdum perscissa furit petulantibus auris
 et fragilis sonitus chartarum comeditatur...¹

here the simile (thunder is like the awnings) becomes the tenor of another simile (the awnings are like paper) in its own right. Elsewhere he appeals to the common experience of scented water used on the stage and altar:

et cum scaena croco Cilici perfusa recens est
 araue Panchaeos exhalat propter odores.²

In the fourth book the theatrical imagery creates a metaphor for the whole theory of *simulacra*. Just as fire visibly casts off smoke and heat and crickets and snakes slough off their skins, so also *a fortiori* fine insubstantial films must be cast off the surface of things just as the colour of the awnings appears to 'dye' the people and theatre below them:

et volgo faciunt id lutea russaque vela
 et ferrugina, cum magnis intenta theatris
 per malos volgata trabesque trementia flutant;
 namque ibi consessum caveai subter et omnem
 scaenai speciem personarumque decorem
 inficiunt coguntque suo fluitare colore.
 et quanto circum mage sunt inclusa theatri

¹ 6. 108-112

² 2. 416-7

moenia, tam magis haec intus perfusa lepore
omnia conrident correpta luce diei.
ergo lintea de summo cum corpore fucum
mittunt, effigias quoque debent mittere tenuis
res quaeque, ex summo quoniam iaculantur utraque.³

Notice here how the experience is first-hand from inside the theatre itself, and note also the pleasant association set up by the metaphor in *conrident*. The argument itself is hardly cogent but the analogy is developed with excess of detail: the three colours named, the detail of *malos...trabesque*, the telling verbs *tremencia flutant* put together to describe the trembling and fluttering of the awnings with maximum effect. The poet's eye goes from the gathered crowd (*consessum*) to the stage set (*scaenai speciem*) and then to the masked actors on stage (*personarumque decorem*) in a tricolon crescendo of great plausibility as the spectator looks at his fellow audience and then the stage and then the actors when they appear. The colouring of these things is well brought out in the next line and charged with the word *fluitare* recalling how the awnings *flutant* in line 77. The language makes it clear that the poet sees the colouring as being more than mere light-effects but a good case of the atomic theory at work; the *simulacra* actually dye the theatre with atoms, the imagery being liquid, the detail being exactly observed:

'fluitare is 'a word properly used of water...this water image is caught up in *perfusa lepore*, soaked in beauty. The end of the quotation

³ 4. 75-86. MSS read *patrum matrumque deorum* at 79: for the emendation printed see Godwin (1986) 97

shows Lucretius following up his interest in the technical details of architecture... If.. the walls of the bowl of a Roman theatre are about the same height as the stage buildings, the more the walls of the theatre are enclosed all around, that is, the fewer chinks there are between the awnings and the top of the theatre walls, the more intensely will everything inside the theatre be saturated with colour as the direct daylight is diminished.⁴

Later in the book the actor's mask is used as an analogy to demonstrate what happens to *simulacra* when they hit a mirror:

nunc ea quae nobis membrorum dextera pars est
in speculis fit ut in laeva videatur eo quod,
planitiem ad speculi veniens cum offendit imago,
non convertitur incolumis, sed recta retrorsum
sic eliditur, ut siquis, prius arida quam sit
cretea persona, adlidat pilaeve trabive,
atque ea continuo rectam si fronte figuram
servet et elisam retro sese exprimat ipsa;
fiet ut, ante oculus fuerit qui dexter, ut idem
nunc sit laevus, et e laevo sit mutua dexter.⁵

The use of masks in the Roman theatre is well attested⁶ and the word *persona* is lavishly attested in the sense of actor's mask⁷. As, however, this is the only instance of the word *creteus* in Roman literature and actor's masks were said to be made of linen and covered the whole head,⁸ Bailey may be nearer the mark when he likens this *cretea persona* to the masks 'such as the Romans often took of the dead'.

⁴ West (1969) 39

⁵ 4. 292-301

⁶ see Beare (1950) 184-6, Beacham (1991) 183-5

⁷ OLD s.v. 'persona' cites this passage as meaning actor's mask (OLD s.v. 1)

⁸ see OCD s.v. 'masks'

The clay quality is important for the didactic context - a linen mask would hardly perform the stunts which the clay one does here.

More telling 'mask' imagery is found in book 3, where there is a striking passage⁹ in which the poet uses the metaphor of the mask to denote the hypocritical front which men wear until forced by danger to reveal their true selves:

quo magis in dubiis hominem spectare periculis
convenit adversisque in rebus noscere qui sit:
nam verae voces tum demum pectore ab ipso
eliciuntur et eripitur persona, manet res.

The importance of honesty and refusing to 'play a role' is central to Epicurean ethics, and the theatrical imagery here is perfect to show the 'superficial materialist who says that he knows that death is not to be feared, but reveals the underlying terror which his philosophical pretensions have merely masked not removed, when he is in danger or distress.'¹⁰

A more telling case still is the poet's coining of the word *postscaenia* to describe the backstage reality which lurks behind the pretty facade of the mistress. The blind un-Epicurean lover has fallen in love with a woman who wisely keeps her distance - if her meretricious theatricality were seen through this would break the illusion and send him running:

at lacrimans exclusus amator limina saepe

⁹ 3. 55-58

¹⁰ Gale (1994) 90

floribus et sertis operit postisque superbos
 unguit amaracino et foribus miser oscula figit;
 quem si, iam ammissum, venientem offenderit aura
 una modo, causas abeundi quaerat honestas
 et meditat diu cadat alte sumpta querella,
 stultitiaque ibi se damnet, tribuisse quod illi
 plus videat quam mortali concedere par est.
 nec Veneres nostras hoc fallit: quo magis ipsae
 omnia summo opere hos vitae postscaenia celant
 quos retinere volunt adstrictosque esse in amore -
 nequiquam, quoniam tu animo tamen omnia possis
 protrahere in lucem atque omnis inquirere risus,
 et, si bello animos et non odiosa, vicissim
 praetermittere et humanis concedere rebus.¹¹

The *Veneres* are of course actresses, and know that they are: but the lover is not acting and would be distressed to have his illusions shattered. The irony at the end of the passage is the observation that when the lover is blindly infatuated he thinks the mistress is perfect but that he could in turn decide to 'turn a blind eye' to her faults once he has seen her in her true colours. Happiness, again, is available to those who see the truth and refuse to nurse illusions about the world; and imperfections fully understood and forgiven are more desirable than non-existent perfections. The analogy with the theatre works perfectly; the mistress is acting a part and has to create illusion in her audience (the lover) or else the excitement is lost, although this excitement is devoid of real content since it is based on mere appearance with no reality behind it - a glimpse at the reality behind it (the *postscaenia*) would reveal the lie. The wise man, on the other hand, will see that all our perceptions are based on *simulacra*. He will see not only the show on the stage but also the back-stage realities

and realise what is truth and what is fiction. Happiness is available for him as he sees through the world of illusion in precisely the manner in which the locked out lover cannot. This scene will be examined again in chapter 7.

Elsewhere in the poem the imagery of the theatre is apparent. Secondary qualities such as slavery, poverty and so on walk on and walk off like actors on the stage:

servitium contra paupertas divitiaeque
libertas bellum concordia, cetera quorum
adventu manet incolumis natura abituque,
haec soliti sumus, ut par est, eventa vocare¹².

just as early man's peaceful life is rudely disturbed by the entrance of a wild animal:

eiectique domo fugiebant saxea tecta
spumigeri suis adventu validique leonis¹³

The poet cannot 'play his part':

nam neque nos agere hoc patriai tempore iniquo
possumus aequo animo¹⁴

and men would not 'play their lives' foolishly if they knew the truth:

si possent homines, proinde ac sentire videntur
pondus inesse animo quod se gravitate fatiget,
e quibus id fiat causis quoque noscere et unde
tanta mali tamquam moles in pectore constet,
haud ita vitam agerent, ut nunc plerumque videmus
quid sibi quisque velit nescire et quaerere semper
commutare locum, quasi onus deponere possit.¹⁵

11 4.1177-1191

12 1. 455-8; cf. 1. 7 and 1.677 for the same imagery of entrances and exits

13 5. 984-5

14 1.41-2: for the theatrical sense of *ago* see OLD s.v. 25

The old fool who is not prepared to die when his time has come is addressed by Nature as a *balatro*¹⁶ - a clown-figure as if from comedy¹⁷, and the child who is taken in by the medicine *ludificetur*¹⁸ - a clear allusion to the comic theatre. The clearest and fullest expression of this is:

sic in amore Venus simulacris ludit amantis¹⁹

where the goddess puts lovers on the comic stage²⁰ and makes fools of them with *simulacra*.

The fourth book takes the mechanics of perception and explains how the insubstantial *simulacra* form the source of everything we see: given that all events are atomic and must have equally atomic causes, sense-experiences can all be explained in rigorously atomic terms. In order to explain this he uses the language of the theatre a great deal; indeed Schrijvers well calls the theatre 'a small but fitting *Leitmotiv* in the book concerned with sense-perception'²¹ In a simple sense this is true, in that his account of sense-perception states that 'reality' (the world outside us) is only perceptible because of the *simulacra* which are emitted from objects and people; this means that the observer is always in the position of the audience in the theatre, at one remove from reality and unable to reach the 'thing in itself'. Just as

¹⁵ 3. 1053-1059: The whole passage will be examined later on in chapter seven as an example of comedy

¹⁶ 3. 955: the correction for the unprecedented MSS reading *baratre* is plausible.

¹⁷ cf. Horace *Satires* 1.2.2

¹⁸ 1. 939 = 4.14

¹⁹ 4. 1101

²⁰ OLD s.v. 'ludo' 6b; cf. esp. 2. 631

²¹ Schrijvers (1980) 142

all *simulacra* are insubstantial and fleeting images, and not the 'things in themselves' at all, and yet our perception is nonetheless reliable when once we have understood the mechanics of it and learnt how to interpret these images, so also the spectator in the theatre who imagined that he was seeing 'real life' rather than pretence would be foolish, and yet he may still 'believe' what he sees. In the theatre we suspend our disbelief and may be moved by emotion and yet are always intellectually aware of the artificiality and so do not feel (e.g.) fear at the spectacle of the Furies. The paradox of theatricality - how the obviously untrue can move us as if it were real - is applied by Lucretius to the whole process of perception itself, where very similar things happen and fool us all the time. The theatre here, then, becomes more than a decorative metaphor and takes over as a concrete demonstration of precisely the tension between truth and representation which the fourth book is examining.

The subject perceives images (of sight, sound, smell etc) which he interprets as being representations of the real things from which they are being emitted; these images are called *effigiae* whose primary sense is 'statue' as in Catullus 64. 161 but which also means 'ghosts' and thus helps to justify the whole topic of perception as a way of disproving the 'proof' of life after death afforded by the sight of ghosts. In the case of moving images the theory demands that the *simulacra* are in fact individual films - however many and frequent - and that (as in a Zeno paradox) the 'moving' reality is actually a series of static states which by their own motion in sequence give the appearance of motion in the

object from which they emanate. This is true in all cases, but it has a neat symmetry in the special case of mirrors: Lucretius uses the language of dance to show how the images in the mirror imitate our actions like a synchronised ballet-troupe:

indugredi porro pariter simulacra pedemque
ponere nobiscum credas gestumque imitari
propterea quia, de speculi qua parte recedas,
continuo nequeunt illinc simulacra reverti
omnia quandoquidem cogit natura referri
ac resilire ab rebus ad aequos reddita flexus²².

The language of dance is used here: *gestus*²³ has the sense of graceful and attractive stance and the same image is used again of the shadow following us at line 365. Later on the dancing show is even more explicit in the description of images in sleep:

quod superest, non est mirum simulacra moveri
bracchiaque in numerum iactare et cetera membra;
nam fit ut in somnis facere hoc videatur imago;
quippe ubi prima perit alioque est altera nata
inde statu, prior hic gestum mutasse videtur.²⁴

where the images stir their arms 'in rhythm' - unlike the ungainly lack of rhythm shown by early man who tried to dance but did so *extra numerum*, beating the mother earth hard with hard feet²⁵. The thought and the language are repeated at 4. 788-93:

quid porro, in numerum procedere cum simulacra
cernimus in somnis et mollia membra movere,
mollia mobiliter cum alternis bracchia mittunt
et repetunt oculis gestum pede convenienti?
scilicet arte madent simulacra et docta vagantur,

²² 4. 318-323

²³ cf. Propertius 2.22.5, Ovid *Amores* 2.4.29, *Pont.* 4.2.33, Martial 6.71.1

²⁴ 4. 767-772

²⁵ 5. 1399-1402

nocturno facere ut possint in tempore ludos

where the repetition of the actions is well brought out by the repetition of words (*mollia...mollia*) and m-sounds (*mollia membra movere mollia mobiliter*). The poet perhaps has in mind a stately dance such as the rope-dance described in Livy²⁶ performed by young girls (for whom *mollia membra* is appropriate): his use of *oculis* involves him in a serious inconsistency, as dreams do not enter the mind through the eyes at all, but keeps the theatrical analogy uppermost in the reader's mind, just as *pede convenienti* means both 'with feet in harmony' and also 'in a suitable rhythm' (appropriate to verse drama). The poet sets up the theatre-show, only to knock it down with withering sarcasm, as he mocks the images as *arte madent..et docta vagantur*: the phrase *ludos facere* often means to 'fool or shame somebody'²⁷, just as the verb *madent* often suggests intoxication (cf. 3.479), all suggesting that the show is - like all theatre shows - an exercise in deception and illusion. The irony here is that the poet is arguing that the illusion of *simulacra* is in fact pointing us to the truth.

Later on Lucretius takes the concept of the spectator at the *ludi* as a prime example of one who sees recurrent images even after the show is ended: here he expands the description of the theatre into its fullest and most relevant form to the argument of the book:

et quicumque dies multos ex ordine ludis
adsiduas dederunt operas plerumque videmus

²⁶ 27.37.12-14

²⁷ OLD s.v. *ludus* 4ab

cum iam destiterunt ea sensibus usurpare
 relucuas tamen esse vias in mente patentis
 qua possint eadem rerum simulacra venire.
 per multos itaque illa dies eadem obversantur
 ante oculos, etiam vigilantes ut videantur
 cernere saltantis et mollia membra moventis
 et citharae liquidum carmen chordasque loquentis
 auribus accipere, et consessum cernere eundem
 scenaique simul varios splendere decores.²⁸

What the poet is describing is memory stirred by a striking spectacle and the constant reliving of both sights and sounds from the *ludi* even when the spectator is awake and far removed from the original experience; the tension between repetition and variety is well evoked in the contrast of the 'same' crowd but the *varios* ornaments of the beauties of the stage. The precision builds up as the passage goes on: the images are seen dancing and moving their limbs (980), then the sound is added (981-2), after which the spectator sees the rest of the audience (*consessum* 982) before the situation is located beyond any doubt in the theatre with the word *scenai*. Again, the moving images are evoked in language echoing the earlier discussion at 768-772 and also 788-93. It is also highly instructive to read the poem in these theatrical terms, and to see the manner in which Lucretius reveals his own philosophy of art through the theatrical stance adopted. For just as the metaphor of the theatre helps to explain the process of perception, whereby sense-data which we know to be 'false' are still believable when correctly interpreted, so also vice versa: the subjective and partial process of sense perception, whereby we only ever see a part of the world and need *ratio* with which to understand that little

which we do see, is itself a metaphor for the work of art which takes 'reality', refracts and compresses it into an artificial frame and compass of time and then presents it to the observer as if it were the whole truth. The poet's use of the word *simulacrum* is itself instructive: the word is clearly being used in its technical sense of Epicurus' εἰδωλον but it also connotes the theatrical shows such as mock-battles as shown above at 2. 324:

praeterea magnae legiones cum loca cursu
camporum complent belli simulacra cientes

and as is found in Livy²⁹: the word also denotes the images carried in triumphal processions³⁰ and the sense of public display is thus kept prominently in the mind of the reader.

The text thus has a clear theatrical dimension. It shows that the way we perceive the world through *simulacra* is itself analogous to the experience of going to the theatre, and thus neatly reverses Plato's strictures on the arts; for Plato the theatre leads people deeper into the realm of appearances and away from the reality which can only be apprehended by reason and philosophy, whereas Lucretius urges us to look ever harder at the reality which our senses (and they alone) show us as this is the only way to apprehend the atomic reality 'out there'. We saw in chapter two how the ethical teachings of the poem rely entirely on our ability to perceive the reality of ourselves and the world, such that we are not to fear death or the gods and that we may realise

28 4. 973-983

29 26.51.6

30 OLD s.v. 'simulacrum' 3b

our deepest needs with *res* which are all around us; we then saw in chapter 4 how the ethical stance of the wise man is that of an 'aesthetic' spectator contemplating life as if in a theatre and refusing to engage directly in the world of politics, love, business etc. In this case it would be surprising if the poem did not also make use of direct theatrical material in the illustration of its teachings; and the next two chapters will examine the worlds of tragedy and comedy to show how the poet does just that.

CHAPTER SIX

THE USES OF TRAGEDY

In the last chapter I examined the ways in which Lucretius uses the theatre itself as imagery; this chapter will look at the ways in which examples from the plays themselves are used for literary and especially ethical purposes. We shall begin with two obvious examples of the poet choosing to imitate a famous passage of tragic poetry.

THE PRELUDE

To begin at the beginning: the interpretation of the prelude of the poem is one of the great *crucis* of Lucretian scholarship. This poem rejecting the superstitious world-view opens with a hymn to a goddess asking for her help. The philosophy tells us that the gods are not concerned for us and yet the prelude prays explicitly to Venus for assistance:

te sociam studeo scribendis versibus esse¹.

Venus is addressed in conventional epic terms as:

Aeneadum genetrix²

and her divine presence is saluted as infusing life and creativity into the world in a direct sense which the rest of the poem will correct. The picture becomes ever more mythological, culminating in the scene of Venus and Mars making love and thus bringing about the peace which the

poet longs for in an anthropomorphic vignette. This is followed by the 'correct' theology³, a passage possibly interpolated by a waggish scribe or a puzzled reader or possibly put there by the poet eager for the theology to be established but the poetry left intact. In 'straight' philosophical terms, this prelude is contradictory to the whole *ratio* which it is the poet's ostensible purpose to instil in the reader.

Various attempted answers have been made. Waszink⁴ pleads that the poet was heavily influenced by Empedocles, whom he admired⁵ - although it was customary for Epicureans to despise him - and Parmenides, seeing their choice to compose in verse, and especially their equation of poetry with light and light with truth as inspiration for his own efforts. The two forces of Empedocles then spring to mind, where Love and Strife fight for supremacy of the universe; but this identification is left to be inferred by the reader, the text becoming thus almost a philosophical *roman à clef*. Another obvious line of enquiry has been to see Venus as a symbolic figure representing the 'force of nature', which by its reproductive delight brings into being all the myriad life-forms we see around us. Lucretius several times uses a personification of Nature⁶ just as elsewhere he plays on the figure of Mother Earth⁷: it may be that Venus is a personified force in the same way, but there is a great deal more to it than that.

2 1.1
 3 1.44-49 = 2. 646-51
 4 Waszink (1954)
 5 1. 716-33

Bignone⁸ has ingeniously argued as follows: if Venus is pleasure, she is first of all the kinetic sexual pleasure which reproduces ourselves but is then transformed into the katastematic pleasure of serenity, peace and friendship. It is as the embodiment of the latter sort of pleasure that she is in a position to represent the peace and serenity that Lucretius needs to write the poem and that Memmius needs to read it. The incongruous lines 44-49 would then find a place as explaining how the gods practise this serenity which Venus has by now come to represent. The difficulty with this is that the passage in question is a prologue and the reader cannot be expected to unpack the finer points of Epicurean pleasures and their distinctions at this early stage in the poem.

An easier form of explanation can be found if we examine the polarity in lines 21-43 between peace and creativity on the one hand and war and death on the other. Lucretius elsewhere⁹ speaks of the equilibrium between these conflicting forces:

nec superare queunt motus itaque exitiales
 perpetuo neque in aeternum sepelire salutem,
 nec porro rerum genitales auctificique
 motus perpetuo possunt servare creatura.
 sic aequo geritur certamine principiorum
 ex infinito contractum tempore bellum:
 nunc hic nunc illic superant vitalia rerum
 et superantur item. miscetur funere vago
 quem pueri tollunt visentes luminis oras;
 nec nox ulla diem neque noctem aurora secuta est
 quae non audierit mixtos vagitibus aegris
 ploratus mortis comites et funeris atri.

⁶ e.g. 3. 931-51; see Brown (1987) 229

⁷ e.g. 5. 795-836

⁸ (1945) 2. 134-342

⁹ 2. 569-572

The imagery of war is presented here as a representation of the balance between the Empedoclean forces of creation and destruction: and the economy of the universe which maintains its existence by balancing these conflicting forces in harmony is well evoked by the poet. The passage in book 2 is an atomic unpacking of the allegory of the prelude, it might be urged, the science by now being refined and understandable after a good deal of atomic exegesis: the reader of the prelude had to have a pretty picture presented to display what later on can be expressed in more rigorously philosophical terms.

Others have drawn attention to the obvious epic nature of the prelude: the epic periphrasis

Aeneadum genetrix, hominum divumque voluptas

used before the name is mentioned, an epic address going back to Ennius¹⁰ and the whole system of legends which traces the ancestry of the Romans back to Troy through Aeneas, son of Venus. This is stamped clearly in epic mould, and Roman epic¹¹ at that; no mere copy or translation of a Greek original but a new creation for Roman readers referring to topical events in phrases such as *hoc patriai tempore iniquo*¹² and in the allusions to named individuals such as Scipio¹³, Ennius¹⁴ and Ancus¹⁵ and to Roman institutions such as the theatre¹⁶, hunting dogs¹⁷ and Etruscan scrolls¹⁸.

10 *Annales* 52
 11 see Mayer (1990)
 12 1. 41
 13 3. 1034, imitating Ennius *Annales* 313
 14 1.117-126
 15 3. 1025, quoting Ennius *Annales* 149
 16 4. 75-86

These considerations all have a great deal to recommend them, and yet they do not by any means exhaust the opening of the poem. The myth and legend of Venus and Troy with their epic significance, the allusion to the Empedoclean forces, the 'before and after' effect whereby Venus at this early stage is seen in glowing healthy terms whereas her later manifestation in book 4 is of unhealthy sexual drives - all these theories require the reader to know more than the poet is prepared to tell us yet. They none of them explain the puzzling passage of 'correct' theology inserted (by the poet or by an interpolator) after the prayer¹⁹. It may be that there is a further explanation available

Venus is at once glossed as *hominum divumque voluptas/ alma Venus*²⁰. It is not coincidental that the highest good for the Epicurean is pleasure, and that the poet is therefore nailing his moral colours to the mast right away by elevating pleasure to the status of divinity. The passage goes on to describe Venus' activities in terms of sunlight, warmth, spring with the goddess being the force behind all this - *Venus physica* - in a way calculated to dispel at once any suggestion that this Epicurean atomism is a gloomy picture of the world in which cold dark atoms collide in a futile random manner and that we might as well never have been born as our lives are purposeless and doomed to certain extinction. The poem will seek to demonstrate that there is no theological purpose to the atomic collisions, and that the source of

17 4. 991-7
 18 6. 381
 19 1. 44-49
 20 1.1-2

everything we know and are is atomic movement, which in turn is blindly caused by gravity assisted by the *exiguum clinamen*; but in this aria of poetry we see the poet rejoicing in the free gift that is life and joy, recognising that within the breasts of living things there is undeniably a force, an instinct towards growth and reproduction which is the source of our survival and our joy. For all the atomic determinism of the science, the prelude is a rapturous celebration of bliss; and the figure of the mythological Venus is a personification of the force which moves all things and the delight which colours our experience of life at its best.

This sort of allegory had already been done in Greek²¹ and the poet himself addresses Nature in personal terms as *rerum..creatrix*²² and uses the term Venus as a synonym for sexual desire and activity²³, the snares of love²⁴, the benefits of love,²⁵ even though he elsewhere adopts the more straightforwardly mythological personification²⁶. This sort of allegory is mentioned earlier in the poem²⁷ as being permissible

dum vera re tamen ipse
religione animum turpi contingere parcat.²⁸

So far, so good. When Empedocles' Love and Strife are personified/allegorised as Mars and Venus in a poem rejecting superstition and also rejecting Presocratic ideas, we know that the objectives are literary and aesthetic rather than coldly logical, and that the beauty of the

²¹ *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite* 1-5, Euripides *Hippolytus* 447-450, 1272-81, Parmenides B12. 3-6 (DK), Empedocles B17, 22, 35, 71 (DK).

²² 1. 629, 2.1117, 5. 1362

²³ 4. 1058, 1071, 1107

²⁴ 4. 1113

²⁵ 4. 1073

²⁶ 4. 1084, 1101

²⁷ 2. 655-660

imagery is a part of the world being celebrated. As the opening of a poem whose ethical precepts will advise us to avoid engagement in the world but rather contemplate it as in a theatre, it would be odd if there were not a 'scene' being set up for the reader to admire. It would also be odd if that scene were not drawn from drama.

The immediate source of the imagery here has so far, however, escaped notice: it is a passage of Sophocles²⁹:

ὦ παῖδες, ἥ τοι Κύπρις οὐ Κύπρις μόνον,
 ἀλλ' ἐστὶ πολλῶν ὀνομάτων ἐπώνυμος.
 ἔστιν μὲν Ἄιδης, ἔστι δ' ἄφθιτος βία,
 ἔστιν δὲ λύσσα μανιάς, ἔστι δ' ἴμερος
 ἄκρατος, ἔστ' οἰμωγμός. ἐν κείνῃ τὸ πᾶν
 σπουδαῖον, ἡσυχαιόν, ἐς βίαν ἄγον.
 ἐντήκεται γὰρ πλευμόνων ὅσοις ἐν
 ψυχῇ τίς οὐχὶ τῆσδε δεύτερος θεοῦ;
 εἰσέρχεται μὲν ἰχθύων πλωτῶ γένει,
 χέρσου δ' ἔνεσπιν ἐν τετρασκελεῖ γονῇ·
 νωμᾶ δ' ἐν οἰωνοῖσι τοῦ κείνης πτερόν,
 ἐν θηροῖν, ἐν βροτοῖσιν, ἐν θεοῖς ἄνω.
 τίς οὐ παλαίουσ' ἐς τρεῖς ἐκβάλλει θεῶν;
 εἴ μοι θέμις, θέμις δὲ τὰ ληθῆ λέγειν,
 Διὸς τυραννεῖ πλευμόνων ἄνευ δορός,
 ἄνευ σιδήρου· πάντα τοι συντέμνεται
 Κύπρις τὰ θνητῶν καὶ θεῶν βουλεύματα.

The obvious line of comparison between the above text and Lucretius' prelude is in the evocation of the universal nature of the power of Venus even in the birds (cf. DRN 1. 12-13) and the beasts (cf. DRN 1. 14-15, and note with Pearson that *θηροῖν* is not confined to *wild* beasts): also the assertion that only Venus has the power to change the hearts of powerful gods who are in warlike mood:

nam tu sola potes tranquilla pace iuvare

²⁸ 2. 659-60

²⁹ fragment 941, cited Stobaeus *flor.* 63.6 and also Plutarch *amat.* 13 p.757a. It is argued by Nauck that the fragment is in fact by Euripides; see Jebb *ad loc.*

mortalis, quoniam belli fera moenera Mavors
armipotens regit...³⁰

echoes the dramatist's confidence that love conquers all, even Zeus, without arms. The image of Love as a victorious wrestler (*παλαίους*) is not too far from the physical embrace of Mars and Venus in which Venus the weaker one defeats Mars the stronger. The paradox of Love as a tyrant with no body-guard (Pearson) is well developed in Lucretius' picture of Mars succumbing to Venus. Above all, the tragic passage makes it clear that the world is not a simple place, that love has many names and takes many forms; that mutability is going to be the prevailing theme of this poem just as it is a prevailing theme of many tragedies³¹. The presocratics were wrong, Lucretius will later on argue, to see one force (fire, e.g.) as the source of being: in the prelude, however, he is setting up Venus as precisely that. Again, the reader is invited in the prelude to contemplate the world around and admire the forces at work; the direct invocation of the 'goddess' is an act on the part of the poet which will always defy explanation - but there is a lot to be said for the idea that the poet is here preaching to the unconverted and that the poem will later on correct what the poem has done.

³⁰ 1. 31-3

³¹ see Jones (1971) 47-9 and *passim*

MOTHER EARTH

At line 991 of Book 2 the poet launches into a famous piece of rhetoric summarising the conclusions of what has gone before in a piece of high mythology on the theme of Mother Earth:

denique caelesti sumus omnes semine oriundi:
omnibus ille idem pater est, unde alma liquentis
umoris guttas mater cum terra recepit,
feta parit nitidas fruges arbustaque laeta
et genus humanum, parit omnia saecula ferarum
pabula cum praebet quibus omnes corpora pascunt
et dulcem ducunt vitam prolemque propagant;
quapropter merito maternum nomen adepta est.
cedit item retro, de terra quod fuit ante,
in terras, et quod missumst ex aetheris oris,
id rursum caeli rellatum templa receptant.
nec sic interimit mors res ut materiai
corpora conficiat, sed coetum dissipat ollis:
inde aliis aliud coniungit, et efficit omnes
res ita convertant formas mutantque colores
et capiant sensus et puncto tempore reddant³²

The obvious source for the mythical picture of Father Sky and Mother Earth - more fully developed at 1. 250-264 - is a fragment of Aeschylus, where Aphrodite speaks³³:

*ἐρᾷ μὲν ἄγνός οὐρανὸς τρῶσαι χθόνα,
ἔρως δὲ γαῖαν λαμβάνει γάμου τυχεῖν,
ὄμβρος δ' ἀπ' εὐνασθέντος οὐρανοῦ πεσὼν
ἔκυσε γαῖαν· ἡ δὲ τίκτεται βροτοῖς
μήλων τε βοσκὰς καὶ βίον Δημήτριον·
δενδρῶτις ὥρα δ' ἐκ νοτίζοντος γάμου
τέλειός ἐστι. τῶνδ' ἐγὼ παραίτιος.*

³² 2. 991-1006

³³ fr. 44 Nauck, cited Athenaeus 13.73 p. 600B

The parallel is close, but one with Euripides even closer: 'There can be little doubt that Lucr. is here closely following and almost translating a passage in the *Chrysippus* of Euripides (fr. 839) which is always said to be founded on the teaching of Anaxagoras, the friend and master of Euripides:

Γαῖα μεγίστη καὶ Διὸς αἰθήρ,
ὁ μὲν ἀνθρώπων καὶ θεῶν γενέτωρ,
ἢ δ' ὑγροβόλους σταγόνας νοτίας
παραδεξαμένη τίκτει θνητούς,
τίκτει δὲ βορὰν φύλά τε θηρῶν,
ὅθεν οὐκ ἀδίκως
μήτηρ πάντων νενόμισται.
χωρεῖ δ' ὀπίσω
τὰ μὲν ἐκ γαίας φύντ' εἰς γαῖαν
τὰ δ' ἀπ' αἰθερίου βλάστοντα γονῆς
εἰς οὐράνιον πάλιν ἦλθε πόλον·
θνήσκει δ' οὐδὲν τῶν γιγνομένων,
διακρινόμενον δ' ἄλλο πρὸς ἄλλου
μορφὴν ἑτέραν ἀπέδειξεν.

The same doctrine is seen in Euripides' *Melanippe* (fr. 484):

ὥς οὐρανός τε γαῖά τ' ἦν μορφὴ μία·
ἐπεὶ δ' ἐχωρίσθησαν ἀλλήλων δίχα,
τίκτουσι πάντα κἀνέδωκαν εἰς φάος
δένδρη, πετηνά, θήρας, οὓς δ' ἄλμη τρέφει
γένος τε θνητῶν.

and the conception of the return of the elements to their own place is found in *Supplices* 532-4:

ὅθεν δ' ἕκαστον ἐς τὸ σῶμ' ἀφίκετο,
ἐνταῦθ' ἀπελθεῖν, πνεῦμα μὲν πρὸς αἰθέρα
τὸ σῶμα δ' ἐς γῆν.³⁴

Greek drama was still very much alive on the Roman stage, as is clear from the echo of the same idea in Pacuvius:

mater est terra; ea parit corpus, animam aether adiugat³⁵

³⁴ Bailey ii pp. 956-7

³⁵ frag. 115 (Warmington)

What is going on here? Bailey points out astutely that:

'..the idea of the return to the elements to their places (999-1001) after death meant something very different to Lucr. from what it did to Euripides. For the latter, as is clear from the *Supplices* passage, it was the body which returned to earth, and the spirit (*πνεῦμα*) to the sky; this would have been an easier doctrine for a Stoic than for an Epicurean.'³⁶

If we are looking for watertight arguments, then, Lucretius has chosen a poor passage to imitate; but of course it is the argument of this thesis that such watertight logic is not - or at least not always - top of the poet's list of priorities.

What the poet is doing is complex: seen in one way the passage is simply allegory, which explains the atomic theory (that we sentient beings are in fact composed of insentient matter) in a flowery tale for entertainment value. Gale neatly explains this:

'In Lucretius, the image of the *hieros gamos* comes at the conclusion of an argument for the proposition that bodies with sensation can be composed of inanimate matter, and also follows the Magna Mater digression; it is again a rejection, not a justification of the myth. Line 998 (*quapropter merito maternum nomen adepta est*) is particularly significant, recalling 598f. and explaining the origin of the myth: in a sense earth and sky *are* our mother and father, but it is vital

to be aware that neither is a god nor even a living being. It is only after the Magna Mater digression and the intervening arguments that Lucretius adds the significant word *merito*.³⁷

David West, in a typically lively passage of interpretation³⁸ shows how the poet's own beliefs are clear ('Lucretius, it must be repeated, does not believe in this drivel'³⁹) but that 'it is wholly in accordance with the empathetic genius of this poet, with the virulence of his polemic and with his own penchant for word-play to mimic the ingenuity of the allegorising technique.'⁴⁰ Nor is this something which the poet just turns on for a single performance: the metaphor of Mother Earth has already been explored in the poem and will occur again later⁴¹ in even greater detail. The point at issue here is clear; Lucretius chooses to use imagery from a world of mythology to dispel myth, to take the weapons of the superstitious and shatter their illusions with them. This process has at times been seen as one of wistful longing whereby the rational philosopher harks back with regret to the magic world of myth which his science must alas leave behind⁴², the famous *anti-Lucrèce chez Lucrèce* of Patin⁴³ - such is the vigour of the language with which Lucretius expresses a view of the world which he is concerned to rebut. The inconsistency is plain to see: having

36 Bailey ii. pp 957-8

37 Gale (1994) 41

38 West (1969) 103-114

39 West (1969) 109

40 West (1969) 104

41 1.250-261, 2.598-9, 5. 796-836

42 Masson (1907) 390, Regenbogen (1932) 73-4, both cited by West (1969) 104

used scientific arguments to demythologise the world - removing the gods from the thunderbolts, for instance - he feels free to remythologise the world in the form of the poetic text, using material from poetic sources to do so. Gale and West point out how the poet behaves in treating mythology in this way, but neither of them offers a convincing rationale to explain it. *Why* does he compromise his logical tightness with such superstitious nonsense?

In the first place, as we have seen, there is a multiplicity of voices going on in this text. The previous chapter attempted to show how the poet uses material from the theatre to illustrate the mechanics of perception and also the folly of illusion: it is also obvious from the poet's use of apostrophe⁴⁴ that he wishes to engage the reader in a dialogue rather than subject him to a monologue. The passages from Aeschylus and Euripides here illustrate the bold way in which the poet takes risks with his material in the interests of the intertextual weight which such famous passages bring and also in the interests of 'dramatising' the debate going on inside the text. Lucretius gives the opposition more than a run for their money: he quotes the world-view of the superstitious and allows it to work its poetic magic on the reader while also dismantling the ideas which support it. What is left is of course poetry: indeed Lucretius explicitly leaves the notions of *Magna Mater* as the peculiar province of poets:

43

Patin (1868)

44

see below 149-54

hanc veteres Graium docti cecinere poetae⁴⁵

which is interesting coming from the mouth of a *doctus poeta* himself. One receives the same ironic *frisson* when Euripides has the wretched Heracles express a view of the gods remarkably Epicurean in form and dismiss tales of their wickedness:

ἐγὼ δὲ τοὺς θεοὺς οὔτε λέκτρ' ἅ μὴ θέμις
στέργειν νομίζω, δεσμά τ' ἐξάπτειν χερσῶν
οὔτ' ἠξίωσα πάποτ' οὔτε πείσομαι
οὐδ' ἄλλον ἄλλου δεσπότην πεφυκέναι.
δεῖται γὰρ ὁ θεός, εἴπερ ἔστ' ὀρθῶς θεός,
οὐδενός· αἰοιδῶν οἶδε δύστηνοι λόγοι.⁴⁶

although we have seen that Heracles' philosophical words here are in fact belied by the activities of Hera. Heracles' words are philosophically far superior to any notion that gods send avenging demons to drive us mad - and yet we have 'seen' that happen on the stage. The 'myth' on the stage is held up to the light of Heracles' reason and found wanting, both in the moral superiority of the man over the gods and also in the simple likelihood of the events taking place at all. As in the tragedy, so in Lucretius: there is a debate going on in which two sides have positions which are incompatible and in which the evidence of what we see is not always congruent with the results of reasoning - rather like the sequence of optical illusions discussed in 4.324-468; Lucretius here is seeking to show us a picture with which we are familiar from mythology but to rehabilitate it to a philosophical purpose, reclaiming it for science and allowing its language to survive only as a mental picture and a verbal set of

⁴⁵

2.600: cf. 6.754

metaphors. The notion of the *hieros gamos* extends beyond the passages cited into the tales of the Spartoi of Thebes, of Jason sowing the dragon's teeth, of the autochthonous heroes of Greece, all of which use the notion of the earth as producing more than mere crops but also people. The use of themes from well-known tragic texts upon which to base the digression thus allows the poet more licence to do this: it recalls an archaic vision from an old play, it summons up a world-view which sits happily in tragedy but would be less sustainable on the Via Appia (rather as Heracles' sufferings are the peculiar stuff of art and yet his words quoted above are a sensible 'prosaic' conclusion about the nature of the gods) and thus it provides the poet with the required distance between his philosophy and his poetic imagery to be able to balance the one against the other without serious damage to either⁴⁷.

The end-product of this manner of poetry is clearly more aesthetic than logical: it uses the imagery of a philosophically unsound world-view for a variety of purposes - light sarcasm as the poet seeks to 'mimic the ingenuity of this allegorising technique'⁴⁸, self-conscious use of metaphorical language to display a way of seeing and at once deny it, intertextual subtlety as the poet draws on a famous piece of poetry and rehabilitates it for more philosophical treatment, thus keeping the artificiality of the text visible between the poet and the reader, the

⁴⁶ Euripides *Heracles* 1341-6

⁴⁷ see further Clay (1983) 240-243 for other important factors relating to this passage: he shows the discrepancies between the Euripides fragment and the Lucretian text, principally 1) the stress on mother earth rather than father aether, 2) L's lack of mention of the gods, 3) the dwelling on the sentience/insentience transformation (2.1006) and 4) the way in which 2. 1015-6 presents 'an image of the origins of the world of four elements and heaven and earth and they are nowhere in Euripides.'

dramatising of the 'opposition' viewpoint to allow greater vividness of expression and consequently greater dramatic interest in what is otherwise a solo tract, and finally a sense in which the poetic creation of the metaphor of the Earth Mother is itself a part of the universe even though the earth herself is not actually a mother. The text becomes a part of the universe which is its subject, and thus, far from being merely a tool in the armoury of the philosopher, passages of myth such as 2.991-1001 are seen as mental constructs which have their own place in the world of the poem even though their scientific credit-rating is low; along with the centaur, these notions only exist in the sub-world of poetic imagination, but have their existence none the less.

In all this the poet is anxious to dispel the misconception that rational philosophy will somehow rob the world of all its colour and turn it into a monochrome universe of drab atoms; there is still room for poetry and even magic, even though there is no room for fear and superstition. The 'magic' side of atomist philosophy is plain both in the range of counterfactual examples used to dispel false ideas (e.g. 1. 215-264) - examples of *adynata* which prove what is there on the familiar logical grounds of: [if P, then Q; but not-Q: therefore not-P] - and also in the factual wonders of the world, such as the magnet and Avernian lakes, which atomist philosophy can understand and explain.

IPHIGENEIA

So far we have examined two famous passages where the poet has drawn on tragic material. The most celebrated example of such 'borrowing' has a very pronounced ethical standpoint and is a key passage in this thesis. The poet begins with his protreptic programme:

illud in his rebus vereor, ne forte rearis
impia te rationis inire elementa viamque
indugredi sceleris.⁴⁹

The slaughter of Iphigenia in book 1⁵⁰ is not narrated in Homer but found its most famous expression in drama, in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, Euripides' *Iphigeneia at Aulis* and also (in the similar figure of Polyxena) in Euripides' *Hecuba*: there are also echoes of Sophocles' *Antigone*. The question posed in chapter one - why did the poet choose a legendary incident in the Bronze Age to discredit religion when he might have chosen a 'real' event in Greek or Roman History? - still needs an answer. After all, a better instance of religion abused out of superstition would be the human sacrifice conducted before the battle of Salamis recorded by Plutarch⁵¹ and having the advantage of being a tale from a 'real' war⁵². Roman history is similarly full of instances of the misuse of religion for political ends - from the execution of unchaste Vestals to the antics of Bibulus in 59 - and this would have killed both birds (religion and politics) with the same Epicurean stone. The death

⁴⁹ 1. 80-82

⁵⁰ 1. 84-101

⁵¹ *Themistocles* 13

of a mythical virgin in the past does not have the same contemporary power with which to persuade the Roman reader to change his (Roman) behaviour. The whole passage is anachronistic, it might be argued, and misses the protreptic point. Answers such as those of Brown⁵³ which state that Iphigenia's death 'sums up human sacrifice throughout the ages' will not do, as the poet's readers are thus being asked to see symbolic value in the incident when the point at issue is too important for such symbolism, and the symbolism is not brought out anyway. One partial answer is that the poet wished to 'dramatise' his philosophy and so deliberately chose an incident from tragedy which would obviously be well-known to the audience and would already carry a charge of pathos and tragedy from its earlier versions; a protreptic short-cut, by which the reader supplies the extra emotion which the tale has accumulated in its tragic settings to add to the poetic power which Lucretius can give it in the present passage.

More to the point of this thesis, the passage shows the 'theatricality' of the protagonists involved; Agamemnon and his men are sarcastically described as *ductores Danaum delecti*, playing a role and acting out a part in order to shore up their flimsy power. The stage-directions of servants trying to hide the weapons from her⁵⁴, of the girl falling dramatically to her knees, before being hoisted up by the hands

⁵² it is however not universally agreed that this event took place at all: see Mossmann (1995) 145 n. 11

⁵³ P. M. Brown (1984), 59

⁵⁴ 1.90

of the men, the progression of events - all come across as powerfully as do the equivalent scenes in Aeschylus and Euripides.

Lucretius locates the narrative in the argument that religion is more often the cause of evil than protection against it: Iphigeneia's death is an example (*quo pacto*) to prove the general rule:

Aulide quo pacto Triviai virginis aram
 Iphianassai turparunt sanguine foede
 ductores Danaum delecti, prima virorum.
 cui simul infula virgineos circumdata comptus
 ex utraque pari malarum parte profusast,
 et maestum simul ante aras adstare parentem
 sensit et hunc propter ferrum celare ministros
 aspectuque suo lacrimas effundere civis,
 muta metu terram genibus summissa petebat.
 nec miserae prodesse in tali tempore quibat
 quod patrio princeps donarat nomine regem;
 nam sublata virum manibus tremibundaque ad aras
 deductast, non ut solemni more sacrorum
 perfecto posset claro comitari hymenaeo,
 sed casta incestu nubendi tempore in ipso
 hostia concideret mactatu maesta parentis -
 exitus ut classi felix faustusque daretur.
 tantum religio potuit suadere malorum.⁵⁵

The poet reports the scene in the style of a messenger speech, his words painting the scene with telling details such as the blood on the altar (85), the girl's tresses (87-8), the servants trying to hide the weapon (90), the tears (91), the girl lifted up on the hands of the men (95), and so on. This is of course no objective account: there is ample moral indignation in the sarcastic *ductores Danaum delecti, prima virorum*⁵⁶, as in the sardonic sacrifice of a virgin to a virgin goddess, there is abundant pathos in the girl's calling the king her father and the 'if only...' wistfulness of the wedding adumbrated in 96-8 being

dashed by the brutal language of *hostia concideret mactatu* with the final indignity being that the sacrificing was being performed by her parent; there are those adjectives and adverbs which load the issue unbearably (*foede... maestum... muta metu... miserae... tremibunda... casta incest...maesta*), culminating in the savage contrast of *maesta...felix faustusque*.

If we look at Aeschylus' account we can compare the two:

ἐπει δ' ἀνάγκας ἔδω λέπαδνον
 φρενὸς πνέων δυσσεβῇ τροπαίαν
 ἄναγνον ἀνίερν, τόθεν 220
 τὸ παντότολμον φρονεῖν μετέγνων.
 βροτοὺς θρασύνει γὰρ αἰσχρόμητις
 τάλαινα παρακοπὰ πρωτοπήμων. ἔτλα δ' οὖν
 θυτῆρ γενέσθαι θυγατρός, 225
 γυναικοποίνων πολέμων ἀρωγὰν
 καὶ προτέλεια ναῶν.
 λιτὰς δὲ καὶ κληδόνας πατρώιους
 παρ' οὐδὲν αἰῶ τε παρθένειον
 ἔθεντο φιλόμαχοι βραβῆς. 230
 φράσεν δ' ἀόζοις πατὴρ μετ' εὐχὰν
 δίκαν χιμαίρας ὑπερθε βωμοῦ
 πέπλοισι περιπετῇ παντὶ θυμῷ προνωπῇ
 λαβεῖν ἀέρδην, στόματός 235

τε καλλιπρώρου φυλακαὶ κατασχεῖν
 φθόγγον ἀραῖον οἴκοις,

βία χαλινῶν τ' ἀναύδω μένει.

κρόκου βαφὰς δ' ἐς πέδον χέουσα

ἔβαλλ' ἕκαστον θυτήρων ἀπ' ὅμ- 240

ματος βέλει φιλοίκτω,

πρέπουσα τῶς ἐν γραφαῖς, προσεννέπειν

θέλουσ' ἐπεὶ πολλάκις

πατρὸς κατ' ἀνδρῶνας εὐτραπέζους

ἔμελψεν, ἀγνᾶ δ' ἀταύρωτος αὐδᾶ πατρὸς

φίλου τρίτόσπονδον εὐποτμον παι- 245

ῶνα φίλως ἐτίμα.⁵⁷

Iphigeneia's cries of 'father' in Aeschylus (228) are transmuted into the futility of having been the first to call him father in Lucretius: Aeschylus' 'war-thirsty commanders' (φιλόμαχοι βραβῆς 230) become Lucretius' *ductores Danaum delecti, prima virorum* (86). Both accounts have the girl seized roughly by the hands of the men (DRN 1. 95 ~ Aeschylus *Agam.* 235) and both have the girl fall forward⁵⁸. The contrast between the holy girl and the unholy sacrifice is brought out in both⁵⁹. In particular, the pathos of the formerly sweet-singing girl

⁵⁷ Aeschylus *Agamemnon* 218-245

⁵⁸ προνωπιῇ ~ *terram genibus summissa petebat*

⁵⁹ *casta inceste* ~ ἀναγνον ἀνίσρον

being now unable to speak except with her eyes is picked up briefly in Lucretius' phrase *muta metu*, a feature of Iphigeneia which suits the theatre better than the epic. These, it might however be urged, are all standard features of the story and do not prove any borrowing of the Greek by the Roman: there are features in the Latin (the play on the funeral wedding, for instance, whereby Iphigeneia was brought to Aulis with the pretence of being about to marry Achilles) which are not in Aeschylus. It is, it might be urged, no more than a rough reminiscence.

Closer, however, to Lucretius is Euripides, whose Iphigeneia is brought to Aulis to marry Achilles - a major sub-plot of the play - and who therefore plays a great deal on the 'funeral marriage' idea⁶⁰ and whose Messenger speech⁶¹ describing the sacrifice is closer in narrative style and content to Lucretius than is Aeschylus: the *virginis* Trivia corresponds to the κορης of 1543, the ministers of Lucretius hide their weapon while Agamemnon in Euripides hides his face in his garment, Euripides making Agamemnon groan aloud while Lucretius has him merely *maestum* for two reasons: firstly because throughout the passage the poet stresses the deception being practised on Iphigeneia, such that the attendants hide the knife and it is only when it is too late that she realised (*sensit*) what was happening and the marriage was not to be; this requires no public declaration of grief or the cover will be blown; secondly because the passage is in many ways reminiscent of

⁶⁰ esp. LA 1036-1097 - cf DRN 1.96-8
⁶¹ 1540-1612

the silent style of the *ecphrasis* which indeed it may well be⁶².
 Interesting parallels and contrasts abound: Euripides has Iphigeneia call Agamemnon πατήρ - Lucretius has her *muta metu* but still gets the point across in a very close echo of Euripides⁶³

πρώτη σ' ἐκάλεσα πατέρα καὶ οὐ παῖδ' ἐμέ

when he brings out the futility of her filial affection:

nec miserae prodesse in tali tempore quibat

quod patrio princeps donarat nomine regem⁶⁴.

Iphigeneia's altruistic wish for the fleet's success:

καὶ τοῦπ' ἔμ' εὐτυχεῖτε· καὶ νικηφόρου
 δώρου τύχοιτε πατρίδα τ' ἐξίκοισθε γῆν..⁶⁵

as also Calchas' prayer⁶⁶:

καὶ δὲς γενέσθαι πλοῦν νεῶν ἀπήμονα
 Τροίας τε πέργαμ' ἐξελεῖν ἡμᾶς δορί

becomes the sarcastic sneer in Lucretius:

exitus ut classi felix faustusque daretur

where *felix faustusque* picks up Iphigeneia's εὐτυχεῖτε. 'Iphigeneia might have expected an animal sacrifice at her wedding' says P.M. Brown ad loc: again picking up an extended piece of dramatic irony in Euripides where the innocent girl questions her father about the sacrifice that will be conducted at her 'wedding' and her future 'married life'⁶⁷. Lucretius follows Euripides' Clytemnestra in declaring that

⁶² Cicero (*Orat.* 74) tells us there was a famous picture of the sacrifice of Iphigeneia: on the *ecphrasis* see especially Fowler (1991) and Laird (1993)

⁶³ *LA* 1220

⁶⁴ 93-4

⁶⁵ 1557-8

⁶⁶ 1575-6

⁶⁷ 640-680 esp 673-676

Agamemnon will kill the child himself⁶⁸, although the messenger in the play leaves us to assume that the deed was to be done by the priest⁶⁹. The striking disparity between Lucretius and Euripides is of course that in the play the girl 'miraculously' disappears from beneath the priest's knife leaving a deer in her place, whereas in the DRN Iphianassa is most certainly killed, both because in an atomic universe such miracles do not happen and obviously because such an ending would make the tale lose all its anti-theological point.

No one single account of a human sacrifice matches every detail of the passage from Lucretius. One reason for this is perhaps that Lucretius has conflated elements of several virgin-sacrifices in his account: one might also usefully compare the deaths of Iphigeneia,⁷⁰ Polyxena,⁷¹ Menoeceus⁷² and even Pentheus⁷³ in Euripides. Polyxena, for instance, compares herself to a heifer⁷⁴, as Euripides does of Iphigeneia⁷⁵, animal imagery common in marriage contexts⁷⁶ but neatly tied in Lucretius both to the sense of 'unmarried girl' and also 'sacrificial victim' as shown by the ribbons which bedeck her like a beast about to be slain: 'an animal victim was adorned with an *infula*, from which its

⁶⁸ IA 1178

⁶⁹ e.g. 1578-9

⁷⁰ *Iphigeneia in Tauris* 1-41, *Iphigeneia in Aulis* esp. 1543-86

⁷¹ *Hecuba* 518-582

⁷² in the *Phoenissae*

⁷³ In the *Bacchae*

⁷⁴ Euripides *Hecuba* 206

⁷⁵ I.T. 359, I.A. 1080-3: cf also Deianeira compared to a πορτις ερηνια at Sophocles' *Trachiniae* 529-30.

⁷⁶ cf. Euripides' *Phoenissae* 947 where Menoeceus is called a 'colt' in justification for sacrificing him rather than the married Haemon.

ends (*vittae*) depended as streamers.⁷⁷ Similarly intriguing are the deaths of the virgin Antigone in Sophocles - who dies for an issue of religious ritual which the author of *DRN* 3⁷⁸ would by no means endorse - and that of the (equally unmarried) Pentheus in Euripides' *Bacchae*, who is torn apart by religious fanatics, one of whom is his parent Agaue. Antigone indulges to the full in the marriage/death tension in her famous final speech,⁷⁹ while Pentheus is slain by his own mother who sees him as a wild animal and does not see the truth in the way that we the audience can. The difference is plain, of course: Agaue would not have killed her son if she had known it was him, while Agamemnon is all too aware of the identity of the person he is killing and still goes ahead - as does Antigone - and yet in Epicurean terms both of them are wrong. Similar conclusions may be drawn from both acts of supersitious madness, then: and it is no coincidence that the Lucretian motto *tantum religio potuit suadere malorum* has been used to summarise the 'anti-theological' interpretation of the *Bacchae*.⁸⁰

The Greek background does not however exhaust the passage. Lucretius has neat Roman detail, such as the six plaits of hair⁸¹ and the *deductio*⁸² of the Roman bride side by side with Greek such as the *Hymenaeus*. The purpose of all this is to put a new focus on the question posed above: why did Lucretius choose a mythological heroine rather than a historical event to demonstrate the wickedness of

⁷⁷ Bailey (1947) vol.2 p. 614

⁷⁸ see esp. 3. 879-881 for criticism of human concern about the fate of the corpse.

⁷⁹ 891-928

⁸⁰ See Dodds (1960) xli

superstition? One answer should by now be clear: the advantage of Iphigeneia over 'real' events is precisely the emphasis on αἰσθησις which the tragic context brings out. Lucretius is, on one level, raising his poetry above the level of a tract or a philosophical pamphlet by composing it in tragic form with tragic content, infusing elements from a variety of plays to deepen the intertextual weight of his argument and to add a visual theatrical dimension to what is otherwise simply a piece of logic backed up by a historical theme. With typical irony, we see the spectacle of Iphigeneia as she is killed but the narrative of her death is partly focalised through her eyes,⁸³ and partly focalised through the eyes of the others on stage,⁸⁴ thus giving us a *mise-en-abîme* effect as we see her seeing and also see others seeing her. The virtue of choosing a scene from tragedy is that the visual aspect is already there and only needs the right words to trigger the associations, even if some of them are inappropriate - some of the tragic virgins suggested, after all, chose to die⁸⁵ and some chose to die for superstitious reasons, thus becoming both their own Iphigeneia and their own Agamemnon all at once.⁸⁶ Furthermore, if the ethical wisdom of the Epicurean wise man consists in observing the world as if in the theatre, then theatrical examples are very much what we would expect to see; the poet's choice of material thus underscores his 'aesthetic' ethical precepts.

81 1.87

82 1.96

83 cf. *sensit* 90

84 *aspectu suo* 91

DRAMATIC FORM AS POETIC MEDIUM

'Indeed, he makes of the poem an occasional dialogue...The mere fact that the voice of *de rerum natura* is not that of the poet and philosopher throughout speaks for a complexity of communication...' ⁸⁷

Drama - and tragic drama especially - has always been the perfect medium for presenting opposing viewpoints in an agonistic framework. One thinks immediately of Pheres and Admetus in the *Alcestis*, of Creon and Antigone in the *Antigone*, of Agamemnon and Menelaus in *Iphigeneia at Aulis*, Creon and Oedipus in *Oedipus the King*, and so on. The epic poet, by comparison, has apparently only one 'voice' with which to present his view of the world, and yet recent studies of Vergil and Lucan have shown how even in this genre there is ample scope for 'further voices' ⁸⁸. Lucretius does this quite obviously and more explicitly than both Vergil and Lucan, and it is these aspects of dramatic style in the narrative didactic voice that we shall now examine.

In the first place Lucretius uses apostrophe. The reader is personally brought into the text on many occasions such as 1.102-3:

tutemet a nobis iam quovis tempore, vaturn
terri loquis victus dictis, desciscere quaeres.

⁸⁵ Euripides' *Iphigeneia in I.A.*
⁸⁶ Sophocles' *Antigone*, for instance.
⁸⁷ Clay (1983) 214
⁸⁸ e.g. Lyne (1987), Masters (1992)

Sometimes it is made plain that the 'reader' is Memmius, as at 1.140-5:

sed tua me virtus tamen et sperata voluptas
suavis amicitiae quemvis efferre laborem
suadet, et inducit noctes vigilare serenas
quaerentem dictis quibus et quo carmine demum
clara tuae possim praepandere lumina menti,
res quibus occultas penitus convisere possis.

while for most of the poem the text is couched in inverted commas as an extended speech in the first person direct to the reader in the second person.⁸⁹ The poet directs the reader towards the truth in an overtly didactic manner, although he markedly shifts in book 4 towards a first person plural stance as he draws attention to the shared perception which his argument demands if it is to escape the toils of Scepticism⁹⁰. The reader is brought into the text as the interlocutor of the philosophical argument, as the subject of the shared perceptions which it provokes and describes, and as the object of the converting zeal of the poet.

More interesting conclusions follow on the apostrophe to Epicurus, however, at the opening of book 3:

o tenebris tantis tam clarum extollere lumen
qui primus potuisti inlustrans commoda vitae,
te sequor, o Graiae gentis decus, inque tuis nunc
ficta pedum pono pressis vestigia signis,
non ita certandi cupidus quam propter amorem
quod te imitari aveo: quid enim contendat hirundo
cycnis, aut quidnam tremulis facere artibus haedi
consimile in cursu possint et fortis equi vis?
tu pater es, rerum inventor, tu patria nobis
suppeditas praecepta, tuisque ex, inclute, chartis,
floriferis ut apes in saltibus omnia libant

⁸⁹ countless exx: e.g. the *nonne vides* figure of 2.263, 5.382 the *noscere ut hinc possis* figure of 2.832, 3.124

⁹⁰ e.g. *videamus* 4.125, *nostras* 248, *nostros* 252, *videamus* 255, *tundimus...tangimus...sentimus...sentimus* 265-8

omnia nos itidem depascimur aurea dicta,
 aurea, perpetua semper dignissima vita.
 nam simul ac ratio tua coepit voceferari
 naturam rerum, divina mente coortam,
 diffugiunt animi terrores, moenia mundi
 discedunt, totum video per inane geri res.⁹¹

The commentators point to the hymnic style of the address: 'it may be compared with the traditional epic invocation of a god, for to the Epicurean his master is a god (5.8) and his mind divine (3.15)⁹² More recently Kenney remarks that 'the style and feeling of the address to Epicurus are hymnic; later in the poem he is actually called a god.'⁹³ Neither scholar seems to feel the tension between such an address and the teaching which its addressee actually propounded, even though that tension is present in the book in several forms. Firstly, the poet tells us that the *aurea dicta* of Epicurus are *perpetua semper dignissima vita* and calls upon him as *pater* as if the dead master were able to hear him - although he falls short of making any request of the master as he does in the case of Venus in book 1. This is in marked contrast to the poet's use of Epicurus later in the book as an example of a great man who is dead, the only passage in the poem where Epicurus is named:

ipse Epicurus obit decurso lumine vitae,
 qui genus humanum ingenio superavit et omnis
 restinxit, stellas exortus ut aetherius sol⁹⁴

The poet cannot simultaneously use Epicurus as an example of a happily dead man and also address him in a hymn. This, it might be urged, misses the point: the poet calls upon Epicurus in a stylised panegyric

⁹¹ 3. 1-17

⁹² Bailey vol ii, 985

⁹³ Kenney (1971) 74

which does not assume the man's continued existence but calls upon his example and his memory, both of which are very much alive and which are themselves *perpetua semper dignissima vita*. But even this falls foul of the poet's insistence that the whole world will one day die, an insistence which ends the previous book and could be expected to be fresh in the minds of both poet and reader⁹⁵. Only the atoms will last for ever: but nothing composed of them will do so, not even the thought of Epicurus or the poetry in which Lucretius expresses it, a tension well known to Ovid and lurking behind his famous praise of the poem:

carmina sublimis tunc sunt peritura Lucreti,
exitio terras cum dabit una dies⁹⁶

Secondly there is a tension of time felt most markedly towards the end of the apostrophe quoted above: 'as soon as Epicurus' *ratio* began to proclaim the nature of things, the terrors of the mind flee and I see the whole world...'. The poet ignores the couple of centuries separating the death of the master and the birth of the poet and sees the stream of time as divided only once, by the thinking of Epicurus which transformed the way the world can be seen as it really is. This sharp dichotomy of pre- and post-Epicurus, combined with the heavy use of imagery relating to light and darkness (*tenebris...lumen...inlustrans*) and seeing (*video*) combines to create an emphasis on αἴσθησις whereby the transformation in the way the world is seen amounts to a

⁹⁴ 3. 1042-4

⁹⁵ 2. 1144-1174

⁹⁶ *Amores* 1.15.23-4

transformation of nature itself and our attitude towards it: terrors flee, but the *moenia mundi* also disappear along with the apparently unshakable certainties about the universe which obtained before Epicurus. Once the master began to speak, then for all time afterwards the boundaries are redrawn⁹⁷. Now it is very difficult to imagine how the poet might have achieved this temporal unity of himself, the master and the reader without the use of apostrophe - one can readily see how the use of this poetic device runs the risks of inconsistency outlined above but still earns its keep in that it can bring Epicurus into the action as a key participant; not simply as an historical figure from conventional epic, whose past exploits are worth recording with pious reverence, but rather as *ratio* incarnate, an active force which animates the poet and the reader into writing and reading the poem. The use of vivid present tenses (*diffugiunt...video*) underlines the active force at work in the poet and through him in the reader. This use of the artificial device apostrophe once again creates a vividness and a dramatic effectiveness which brings poet, reader and Epicurus on to the same stage and allows the divisions of time and space between all of them to be ignored and transcended. The effect is aesthetic in the sense that it re-creates a scene which by definition cannot occur - the long-dead Epicurus, the poet and the absent reader all being summoned onto the stage of the text, the transference of ideas from one to the other being dramatised and made visual in palpable form.

Apostrophe is one form of direct address, and the narrator apostrophises Venus, Epicurus and Memmius as well as the reader throughout the text, who is cajoled with encouragement⁹⁸, mockery⁹⁹, indignation at the thought of his words being ignored¹⁰⁰ and all three in the diatribe against the fear of death¹⁰¹ - along with warnings of the consequences of ignoring his words¹⁰². The poet also puts imaginary words ironically into the mouths of Nature herself¹⁰³ and of imaginary mourners¹⁰⁴ in the diatribe against the fear of death.

The diatribe¹⁰⁵ often composed this sort of *prosopopoea*: but Lucretius apparently goes out of his way to give his opponents the chance to persuade:

'iam iam non domus accipiet te laeta, neque uxor
optima, nec dulces occurrent oscula nati
praeripere et tacita pectus dulcedine tangent.
non poteris factis florentibus esse, tuisque
praesidium. misero misere' aiunt 'omnia ademit
una dies infesta tibi tot praemia vitae'¹⁰⁶

This is no cheap *In Memoriam* verse in bad Latin: there is a neat tricolon crescendo of the house, the wife and then the children, each with their own adjective of approval - the house is *laeta* (a nice pathetic fallacy), the wife is *optima* and the children are *dulces*, reinforced by *dulcedine* in the next line, complete with the psychologically plausible *tacita* expressing the inner feelings of the father rather than any outward

98 e.g. 4.522-3

99 e.g. 4.44

100 e.g. 1.50-53

101 encouragement: 3.1024-1044: mockery and indignation: 3.1045-52

102 e.g. 6.68-79

103 3. 931-977

104 3. 894-908

105 on the diatribe and popular philosophy see Freudenberg (1993) 8-21

show, as also the vignette of the children fighting for the kiss (*occurrent...praeripere*) encapsulating both the meeting of the parent and children and also the root *-curro* suggesting their haste developed in the prefix *prae* in *praeripere*. From emotion to pride and strength, as the lament bewails the future insecurity of the bereaved lacking their protector, a fate similarly bewailed by Andromache of the future fate of her son Astyanax in Homer¹⁰⁷, just as earlier Priam lamented his future humiliation¹⁰⁸. Kenney¹⁰⁹ remarks that Epicurus himself left a will which 'included full instructions for the care of his dependants and the freeing of his slaves', adding that Lucretius' answer 'that these things do not trouble a man *when he is dead*, is totally beside the point.' This is simply wrong; the care for one's family is laudable but will be impossible to maintain once the person is dead and the man being lamented is by now (*iam iam*) very dead, and anyway the reader most naturally takes *earum...rerum* to refer to the *praemia* which death has removed. The mourners are, therefore, factually wrong to ascribe suffering to the dead man, even such morally acceptable suffering as the altruistic care for one's dependants - the time for such care is (as in the case of Epicurus himself) before death, not after. However, Kenney's natural revulsion affords us a nice example of the aesthetic over the logical: the fate of the dependants is a familiar lament from

106 3. 894-899

107 *Iliad* 22. 490-507

108 *Iliad* 22. 66-76

109 Kenney (1971) 205

epic and tragedy¹¹⁰, and allows a glimpse of the undeniable sorrow of death - if death were not so there would be little need of a whole book of the poem to deal with it. The wistful nostalgia of the lines is not simply mockery or parody: it evokes feelings with which the reader can associate, much as the speech of Calicles in Plato's *Gorgias* likewise expresses views which Socrates will destroy but which deserve a powerful presentation of immediate persuasive force.¹¹¹ The mourners are wrong to ascribe unhappiness to the dead - and so the repeated *misero misere* is transferred feelings from themselves to the corpse - but the poet's 'answer' does not take away the entire force of the speech, and it does justice to the feelings which exist in the reader.

Only in the second speech of the mourners does the poet begin to mock with real edge :

'tu quidem ut es leto sopitus, sic eris aevi
quod superest cunctis privatu' doloribus aegris;
at nos horrifico cinefactum te prope busto
insatiabiliter deflevimus, aeternumque
nulla dies nobis maerorem e pectore demet.¹¹²

Here the focus of the attack shifts to the unworthy recriminations of the bereaved who paradoxically envy the corpse safely and happily dead (*cunctis privatu' doloribus aegris* is a neat summary of the Epicurean ideal of *ἀταραξία*) while they live on to mourn, thus confirming the epicurean stance that death is not painful in itself while also parodying the selfish sorrows of the bereaved. The style also become more

¹¹⁰ many exx. could be cited: cf. e.g. Euripides *Troades* 677-8

¹¹¹ Plato *Gorgias* 482c4-486d1

¹¹² 3. 904-908

inflated and less ingenuous than their earlier speech: the long words of 907, the pair of compound words *horrifico cinefactum*, the hyperbolic adverb *insatiabiliter*, whose 'only other use in Lucretius is of swine rolling in filth, 6.978'¹¹³ The mourners of course give the poet an easy target in their confident assertion of everlasting grief:

the dead man is safely free of pain

they will themselves one day die

Therefore they cannot have everlasting pain.

The poet has thus switched from pathos to satire, both informed by reasoning, in the space of 17 lines. The shifting of the register of language shows that this is no monolithic epic voice but rather a set of voices which occasionally clash. We have here not a simple *suasorium* but an *agon*.

There are other examples of tragic style and attitude in the text: there is dramatic irony in the depiction of human beings ignorant of truths which the reader and the poet know, collusion between author and audience against the human foils portrayed such as the mourners, the lover, the politician striving for power. This process takes its most extreme form in the prologue to book 4, where the reader is both audience and actor at the same time, being told that he is being deceived with poetry like the child with honey on the rim of the cup¹¹⁴, just as the audience in the theatre knows that it is 'only a story' but still finds itself moved. A more extreme form still is the ironic use of myth,

¹¹³ D. West (1969) 29

¹¹⁴ see the detailed discussion in chapter three above (pp. 86-87)

as we have seen earlier in this chapter: the poet will produce a passage of great beauty and religious awe and wonder, only to knock it down with a rationalistic stroke such as:

quae bene et eximie quamvis disposta ferantur
longe sunt tamen a vera ratione repulsa¹¹⁵

which teases the reader with the philosophical equivalent of one of Odysseus' 'Lying Tales'.

Elsewhere the poet puts words into the mouths of deluded lovers¹¹⁶, and of the nostalgic farmer¹¹⁷. The opening address to Venus reads like a hymn written by somebody else, its 'theology' (of divine assistance) refuted by the end of the page¹¹⁸ by the voice of the poet. Opponents of Epicureanism have their theories described and then refuted, thus indirectly introducing alternative explanations of matter into the argument even when such explanations were no longer current in Republican Rome. The motive behind such passages is no doubt variation of the teaching style, the injection of mockery of opponents being good for Epicurean morale; but the effect is (again) to make us feel that we are attending a dramatic debate rather than simply a lecture, especially when the ridicule of the presocratics imitates the style of each thinker being satirised¹¹⁹. At least some of Patin's famous *anti-Lucrèce chez Lucrèce* material may better be seen as the poet allowing discordant voices and dissonant ideas to enter the discussion in order to

¹¹⁵ 2. 644-5

¹¹⁶ 4. 1160-1170

¹¹⁷ 2. 1164-1174

¹¹⁸ 1. 44-49

¹¹⁹ as well shown by R.D. Brown (1983)

enrich the texture of the poem. The tragic precedent for this kind of discussion - virtually every tragedy extant has an *agon* scene of some kind - is obvious: and the tragic precedents for the poetic debate are not all models of logical excellence. The arguments used in the trial scene of Aeschylus' *Eumenides*, for instance, are poor arguments but they make extremely good theatre; Lucretius often sways us more often by the visual impact of the evidence described than he is coercing us with the power of logic. It is hardly the pursuit of *ataraxia* to court discord - but such agonistic writing is highly aesthetic in this 'safe' context where the opponents are safely dead presocratics or mythological beasts. The irony here is that 'opponents' such as centaurs are in fact 'killed' verbally by having their existence refuted rather than by being slain by a Heracles. Epicurus, by contrast, slew the giants of fear by showing that these fears were empty paper tigers. The logical connection of ethics and aesthetics here is that our appreciation of the world of human facts and human values rescues us from the suffering which tragedy expresses. The spectacle of false opinion being refuted in argument affords aesthetic pleasure in itself and also furthers the ethical aim of the text by correcting our perception of the world. Pleasure thus is the means and the end of this sort of text.

Tragedy may also be seen to have provided something of the flavour of the poet's ethical theory. If, as we saw in chapter two, happiness and goodness rest on our correct apprehension of the truth through the senses, then we are suddenly close to the notion of *ἀμαρτία* whereby illusion brings about disaster; the 'mistakes' of

Oedipus, Ajax, Heracles are clearly ones of simple perception rather than any moral flaw¹²⁰; the familiar Sophoclean theme of *opsimathesis*¹²¹ is one that Lucretius would have recognised, whereby seeing the truth is essential in order to live a good life and disaster strikes if the truth is seen too late. The Aristotelian concept of the tragic *anagnorisis* also points towards the same primacy of sense-perception in shaping the lives and destinies of the tragic characters. The path from ignorance to knowledge is one that Lucretius recommends to us all, especially as the mode of recognition is through *σημεία*¹²², a term well known to the Epicurean philosopher¹²³.

More immediately relevant to this thesis is the experience of the audience in the theatre. The tragic theatre depicts the suffering of characters on stage which is painful and yet turns this pain into the pleasure of the work of art - a paradox examined by Gorgias¹²⁴:

τὴν ποίησιν ἅπασαν καὶ νομίζω καὶ ὀνομάζω λόγον ἔχοντα μέτρον. ἧς τοὺς ἀκούοντας εἰσῆλθε καὶ φρίκη περίφοβος καὶ ἔλεος πολὺδακρυς καὶ πόθος φιλοπενθήs, ἐπ' ἀλλοτρίων τε πραγμάτων καὶ σωμάτων εὐτυχίαις καὶ δυσπραγίαις ἰδιὸν τι πάθημα διὰ τῶν λόγων ἔπαθεν ἡ ψυχή.

We are suddenly back in the world of the proem to book 2 where the wise man watches the sufferings of others as if in the theatre

¹²⁰ cf. the *apologia* of Oedipus to 'moral' criticism in *Oedipus at Colonus* 960-1002. This assumes a sharper definition of *hamartia* which not all scholars would perhaps accept: see Jones (1971) 15: 'the Greeks did not distinguish wickedness and stupidity with anything like Christian definiteness.' Intellectual error may after all derive from moral negligence; see Stinton (1975).

¹²¹ e.g. *Antigone* 1270

¹²² Aristotle *Poetics* 1454b21

¹²³ cf. e.g. Diogenes Laertius 10. 87, 97; Philodemus *de signis* and Sedley (1982)

and derives pleasure (*suave*) from doing so. Macleod comments astutely on the Gorgias passage:

'This exactly corresponds to the common Greek conception of pity as a sentiment caused by seeing that another's troubles are the same as troubles we might endure or have endured ourselves: cf. Soph. *Ajax* 121-6, *O.C.* 560-8, Hdt. 1.86.6., Thuc. 5.90-1, Aristotle *Rhetoric* 1385b13ff. The Greeks also carefully distinguish between the feeling evoked by our own suffering or the suffering of those very close to ourselves, and by others' suffering (Hdt. 3.14, Aristotle *Rhet.* 1386a17-28); only the second kind is proper material for tragedy (Hdt. 6.21.2)¹²⁵

Only the second kind, we might add, is material for the wise man to enjoy watching according to Lucretius: it is the suffering of the unnamed *alterius* who gives us pleasure¹²⁶. It is not inconceivable, therefore, that the pleasure being espoused in the opening of book 2 is close to that tragic pleasure which the Greeks saw as belonging peculiarly to tragedy: the *οἰκεία ἡδονή* of tragedy comes from pity and fear¹²⁷ even though such feelings are a form of *λύπη*¹²⁸ and we are left again with the paradox that Gorgias alludes to: pain may be turned into pleasure through the ministration of art¹²⁹ as was already seen by

¹²⁴ Gorgias *Helen* 9

¹²⁵ Macleod (1982) 5 n.1

¹²⁶ 2. 2

¹²⁷ Aristotle *Poetics* 1453b10-14

¹²⁸ Aristotle *Rhet.* 1382a21-22; 1385b13

¹²⁹ Macleod (1982) 7 n.4 cites parallels to this: Plato *Ion* 535b-536d, *Philebus* 47e-48b, *Republic* 605c-606b, Timocles *C.A.F.* ii. 453. 5-7: see also Murray (1996) 225

Homer¹³⁰. Indeed Homer even seems to envisage something like the 'fetishisation of the aesthetic' theory:

τὸν δὲ θεοὶ μὲν τεύξαν, ἐπεκλώσαντο δ' ὄλεθρον
ἀνθρώποις, ἵνα ᾗσι καὶ ἐσσομένοισιν ἀοιδή¹³¹

with the implicit assumption that suffering is almost justified as it gives the subject matter of poetry to later generations, a concept with a long and distinguished history¹³².

One problem with the above is that Lucretius in the proem to book 2 does not observe that watching others suffer will bring 'pity and fear' or Gorgias' *φρίκη περίφοβος καὶ ἔλεος πολύδακρυς καὶ πόθος φιλοπενθήης* but simply pleasure on its own. Lucretius does however elsewhere¹³³ allude to his own *divina voluptas.. atque horror* and there is abundant material in the poem to show that he saw the unpleasant side of life as well as the prettiness of it all: from the taste of wormwood¹³⁴ and the biting on a stone in a piece of bread¹³⁵ to the woes awaiting the new-born infant:

tum porro puer, uel saevis proiectus ab undis
navita, nudus humi iacet, infans, indigus omni
vitali auxilio, cum primum in luminis oras
nixibus ex alvo matris natura profudit,
vagituque locum lugubri complet, ut aequumst
cui tantum in vita restet transire malorum.¹³⁶

130 *Odyssey* 15. 399-400, 23. 301-8 (cited Macleod (1982) 7 n.4

131 *Odyssey* 8.579-80; cf. 3.203-4, 11.433, 24.200-1, *Iliad* 6.357-8

132 cf. Nietzsche *Die Geburt der Tragödie* § 5, § 24 (on which see Silk and Stern (1981) 294, 346-7). On the term 'Fetishisation of the Aesthetic' see Martindale (1993) 41-2

133 3. 28-29

134 1.936

135 3. 692-4

136 5. 222-227

where the suffering of life is still part of the experience which the poet gives us and which even allows him a wry joke (the infant might well cry, in view of what is ahead of him...). Above all else, there is the Plague.

The pessimism of the *de rerum natura's* closing pages is often contrasted with the apparent optimism of its opening, and doubts are raised about whether the poet was 'really' as *felix* as Vergil would have us believe¹³⁷. Why, it is felt, should the poet who preaches that human life is capable of being as good as that of the gods close his poem with the inexorable pain and degradation of a whole city dying? We saw in Chapter 1 how this presents a problem for the 'straight' reading of the poem, as it might be said to negate the optimistic tenor of the rest of the poem: death is nothing to fear, the poet argues at length in Book 3, and yet here we have a lengthy exploration of one particularly grisly way to die; Book four ends with an almost cosy picture of family life and yet here we see the breakdown of all ties of affection in the face of suffering and death. Some didactic points are being made, of course - the plague is an atomic event carried and caused by atomic movement, and above all it has nothing to do with the displeasure of the gods (unlike the theological plagues of (e.g.) Homer *Iliad* 1 or Sophocles *Oedipus the King*) and the immoralities of the human victims are the result of the plague and not its cause. This still leaves the 'straight' reader aching for a 'final' closure which will draw morals and conclusions and leave us with the sort of

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Georgics 2. 490-492, but see Thomas *ad loc.* for qualification

positive view of the world which the poet time and again promises with characteristic imagery of light and reason:

hunc igitur terrorem animi tenebrasque necessest
non radii solis neque lucida tela diei
discutiant, sed naturae species ratioque¹³⁸

The epilogue on the plague at Athens, then, is a stumbling block to those who see the poem as a facile essay on the joys of being Epicurean, but it presents fewer problems in the context of a contemplative aesthetic ethic which enjoins the reader to observe the world in all its pleasure and horror and thus acquire wisdom and live the good life. Wisdom is acquired through pain in tragedy, and yet wisdom may also be acquired by the watching of others' tragedies on the stage. Once again, the logic is clear: if pleasure is the good, and if watching tragedy can give us pleasure, then it is good to watch tragedy. The 'peculiar pleasure' of tragedy is so close to what the poet calls *suave* at the beginning of book 2 that it is an irresistible conclusion that the explanation of the plague at the end of the poem is precisely the tragic dimension within which the text is composed. Other explanations rely on the reader decoding the symbolism¹³⁹ whereby the plague stands for mental *curae*¹⁴⁰ or the unredeemed state of man before Epicurus¹⁴¹. Müller¹⁴² on the other hand is surely right to stress the universal nature of the plague as something that could recur at any time. Minyard's account would make Lucretius promote the apolitical side of

¹³⁸ 3. 91-3

¹³⁹ see e.g. Gale (1994) 225-8

¹⁴⁰ e.g. Commager (1957)

¹⁴¹ Minyard (1985) 60-1

Epicureanism by using the plague as 'proof' that political societies do not work; it turns the Hippocratean catalogue of symptoms into satire, which it patently is not; and it is inconceivable that Lucretius would have left the 'before and after' point so obscure if that were the point of the whole passage. Commager's account relies heavily on the reader deciphering points which the poet might well have made explicitly rather than leaving them to be drawn out later. Clay¹⁴³ argues that the plague passage is a test of the reader's conversion, a final tableau to prove that the wise man may look even on suffering of this order unmoved. This interpretation is on the right lines, but it does not draw the parallel with tragedy without which it ends up leaving the poem as 'a course of instruction culminating in a final examination paper'¹⁴⁴.

In broadly general terms, the *de rerum natura* has the shape and sweep of a tragedy. The poem begins with the joy and power of creation (modelled as we saw at least partly on Sophocles¹⁴⁵) and ends with the dismal death of the city in the plague; a pattern reminiscent in particular of tragedies such as *Oedipus the King* but in this case with the plague at the end rather than the beginning. It is after all difficult to see why the poet should choose to end his poem with such a depressing picture of suffering, unless his intention were at least partly to project the tragic view of the whole human community. This is quite well seen by Penwill:

142 Müller (1978) 220
 143 Clay (1983) 266
 144 Penwill (1996) 152
 145 frag. 941

'We have the sense of an ending here, and the ending is a tragic one... For Lucretius the tragedy is that of the common man, the person most truly 'undeserving' and 'like ourselves'¹⁴⁶ - because s/he *is* ourselves.¹⁴⁷

This thesis wishes to take things a great deal further. The poem has an ending which is not merely tragic but Tragic; the comparison with the proem to book 2 (sneered at by Penwill¹⁴⁸) is vital here as it ties up the attitude of mind of the wise man contemplating with pleasure and the tragic scene before his gaze. Only the 'peculiar pleasure' (*οἰκεία ἡδονή*) of tragedy can do justice to both without leaving us with Bailey's notion of the poet's 'unpleasant egoism and even...cruelty'¹⁴⁹ on the one hand and bleak unredeemed misery on the other. Penwill sees the tragic nature of the ending and even brings in our Aristotelian feelings of pity and fear, and yet stops short of asserting that the tragic form gives any sense of redeeming the text; for him the ending is a *mimesis* of the ending of life, a recreation in textual form of the process of death itself¹⁵⁰

For the comparisons with Sophocles are more than coincidental: it was after all a plague which prompted Oedipus to

¹⁴⁶ Aristotle *Poetics* 1453a2-6

¹⁴⁷ Penwill (1996) 160. The tragic dimension of the poem had already been seen implicitly by Arragon (1961) 387-9 and more explicitly by Wormell (1965) 61; both of whom, however, see the text as indicative of the poet's attitude and malaise (cf. Perelli (1969)) rather than a conscious artistic decision. Nobody would dare do the same with Sophocles.

¹⁴⁸ 'Is Lucretius expending the full force of his poetic talent to create a picture of devastation and misery in order to give us *pleasure*?' (Penwill (1996) 152). Sophocles and Euripides did!

¹⁴⁹ Bailey (1947) ii. 797

¹⁵⁰ 'infection (the invasion of noxious particles), multiplication of symptoms, physical pain, increasing mental derangement (be it delirium or senility), increasing solitude as one loses contact with those around, and finally the moment of death, which ends it all. After death there is no more sensation, no more feeling, no more words. The rest is silence.' (Penwill (1996) 163)

make his fateful inquiries which lead to his downfall, and his relentless pursuit of truth, come what may, is akin to that of Epicurus - or (for that matter) Lucretius himself. The poem begins with high spirits, youth and happiness as the poet celebrates the forces of life and creativity: the poem then examines the moral option of seeing the world as it is and living the life of wisdom rather than pursuing the folly of luxury or power, vignettes such as the nostalgic farmer, the old man reluctant to die, the foppish lover all figures from light drama and comedy¹⁵¹, one-sided in their moral persuasiveness. The poem ends with death, disease, degradation: there is no redeeming 'moral' twist, no clouds of glory and no life after death: simply heaps of bodies with nobody to bury them after the plague has ruined both the bodies and the finer feelings of the whole community.

The best sense, then, which can be made of the poet's decision to end the poem here is as follows: the reader at the end of the poem is left rather like the spectator at the end of a tragedy; impressed by the aesthetic pleasure of a depiction of what is in 'real life' suffering, safely looking down with pleasure at the pain of his fellow-men as he was doing at the beginning of book 2. Just as the ending of tragedies such as Euripides' *Troades* or *Hippolytus* or *Bacchae* sees human beings destroyed mentally, physically and morally often through and for their best qualities, so also here the good men die because they try to save their fellows while the bad die as well¹⁵². The only

¹⁵¹ as will be examined in chapter 7

¹⁵² 6. 1239-46

redeeming feature of this bleak landscape is the artistic and aesthetic beauty of the means of its presentation and the pleasure to be gained from this knowledge. The medium is here the message, namely that the aesthetic contemplation even of extreme suffering is the only source of pleasure (and therefore happiness) in a world which (like ourselves) is doomed to death and oblivion. The tragedy of death spells out this grim truth with all too graphic detail. The contemplation of the truth brings pleasure, and may be (as here) the only pleasure available to *mortalibus aegris*, the tragic realisation of the inevitability of death its only means of transcendence through the immortalising power of poetry: paradoxically, the gloomy ending to the poem is the only fitting way to end a work whose message is that we can look for no abiding happiness or pleasure except through the transitory senses of a body which is soon facing extinction. Wisdom will bring happiness - but wisdom means accepting the certainty of tragedy, and the poem has the aesthetic qualities of tragedy.

Ironically, however, this tragedy of death spells the death of tragedy. It is, after all, the argument of the poem as a whole that death comes to all and that there is no hope in seeking help from disinterested deities. The Sisyphean labour of the politician is a folly because political power is not worth striving for, and the wise man is right to mock the follies of others, just as he is right to mock the superstitious folly of praying to the gods when they do not hear us. The consequence of the Epicurean life-style, however, would remove much

of the trappings of tragedy from the world: gone would be all the stories of gods interacting with human beings, thus removing Heracles altogether and changing the plots of many plays (*Ajax* and *Hippolytus* for example). Gone would be the *Sturm und Drang* of the Seven against Thebes or the Trojan War (fought senselessly for a woman and so not worth beginning) and Antigone's self-sacrifice for her brother's corpse would find little sympathy with the author of *de rerum natura* 3. 879-83. Even incest such as that of Oedipus is of no concern to the uncaring deities in their *intermundia* and his consequent self-blinding is as unnecessary as it is foolish - as is, for that matter the agonised matricide of an Orestes who should have learnt Epicurean *αὐτάρκεια* and outgrown the dependence on his family. The tragic fate of Creon arising out of his exercise of political power would be a lesson to all Epicureans, and the crafty deceit of Odysseus in Sophocles' *Philoctetes* shows the evils of mendacity, although the intervention of Heracles would raise the Epicurean eyebrow. The god Dionysus and the great hero Heracles find especial mention, not least because the myth of their divine/human parentage is directly contrary to the Epicurean belief in divine unconcern for us. Hercules - who 'was regarded...as the supreme benefactor of mankind and had been adopted as their patron by the Stoics'¹⁵³ earns a lengthy passage of parodistic anti-encomium, the style being ironically epic and overblown:

Herculis antistare autem si facta putabis,

longius a vera multo ratione ferare.
 quid Nemeaeus enim nobis nunc magnus hiatus
 ille leonis obsesset et horrens Arcadius sus? 25
 denique quid Cretae taurus Lernaëaque pestis
 hydra venenatis posset vallata colubris?
 quidve tripectora tergemini vis Geryonai

 tanto opere officerent nobis Stymphala colentes
 et Diomedis equi spirantes naribus ignem 30
 Thracis Bistoniasque plagas atque Ismara propter?
 aureaque Hesperidum servans fulgentia mala,
 asper, acerba tuens, immani corpore serpens
 arboris amplexus stirpem, quid denique obsesset
 propter Atlanteum litus pelagique severa, 35
 quo neque noster adit quisquam nec barbarus audet?
 cetera de genere hoc quae sunt portenta perempta
 si non victa forent, quid tandem viva nocerent?
 nil, ut opinor: ita ad satietatem terra ferarum
 nunc etiam scatit et trepido terrore repleta est 40
 per nemora ac montes magnos silvasque profundas;
 quae loca vitandi plerumque est nostra potestas.¹⁵⁴

Costa¹⁵⁵ well brings out the sardonic and hyperbolic qualities of the passage: 'It is a sardonic passage, with the labours ironically described in turgid and inflated language: *Nemeaeus magnus hiatus* 24, *venenatis vallata colubris* 27, *tripepectora tergemini vis Geryonai* 28....the series of questions beginning with *quid* 24 is finally answered bluntly and unequivocally with *nil, ut opinor* 39.' The case is made all the more convincing by the mock epic language and the denigrating tone of *Arcadius sus*, the redoubled trebles of *tripepectora tergemini*¹⁵⁶, the sarcastic *spirantes naribus ignem*, the tricolon crescendo of *asper, acerba tuens, immani corpore serpens* appropriately building up the monster in layer upon layer of language, the geographical exactitude of

¹⁵⁴ 5. 22-42

¹⁵⁵ (1984) 51-2

¹⁵⁶ *tripepectora* only occurs here.

line 31, and so on. The argument is bluntly and cruelly put: these monsters would be dead by now, and Hercules is not with us to rid us of the monsters which now need shooting, and these monsters live in places where nobody with any sense would go anyway. Once again, the world of 'heroic' myth and legend is sent up by its own style and subverted in the interests of philosophy; the myth is left in place as a poetic construct but its subject is held up to Epicurean *ratio* and found wanting. Similarly, the idea of Ajax killing cattle in deluded hallucination thinking that they were the Greek chiefs whose death was deserved because of a dispute over glory - all this would be rendered quite ludicrous on Epicurean principles; just as is the sacrifice of Iphigeneia to make the gods send wind.

In conclusion, the poem thus uses the language and the mode of tragedy sometimes in order to destroy the world-view it adopts, the argument using the style of one world-view while systematically substituting another one with greater philosophical justification; at other times the poem remythologises the world, salvaging the imagery of superstition for poetic effects and recontextualising such material in a new philosophical world but maintaining the essential wonder at the world and also the tragic view of the aesthetic nature of all such contemplation and speculation in a world doomed to destruction. In this way the aesthetic experience can be clearly separated from the contents of the drama which give rise to it, the pleasure of contemplation being as ever contrasted favourably with the folly which is being contemplated,

the ἀταραξία of the wise man secured not only in contradistinction to the anxiety and folly of the unenlightened, but actually secured through the contemplation of the folly which it eschews. In this sense the poem's tragic form and content is itself its own object of aesthetic contemplation, the wise reader looking down on the text in his hands just as securely and wisely as the man on the heights at 2.1ff or again at 2. 331-2¹⁵⁷. This self-referential irony is yet another feature of the poem's many-layered complexity, another example of the conflicts at the heart of the text and the voices at work to make the poem less of an epic monologue and more of a tragic *mise-en-scène* with clashing of arguments and dramatic irony whereby the reader knows more than the characters in the story and is colluding with the author and Epicurus in the discovery of the truth. The poem not only recommends contemplation as a way of life (Aesthetics being the ethical ideal) but uses the aesthetics of theatricality to enshrine this aesthetic attitude in a form which recreates the experience for the reader. He is not simply told to go away and look at the world: the poet is the theatrical producer who puts on the show for the reader and who represents the comedy and the tragedy of the world as a display which alone gives both meaning and pleasure to the human spectator.

¹⁵⁷ see De Lacy (1964)

CHAPTER SEVEN: THE COMEDY OF ERRORS

The content of the Tragic drama provides, as we saw in the previous chapter, a rich fund of imagery and persuasive material for the poet, and the tragic outlook pervades the poem in many ways. The text is also, however, one of exuberance and comedy, and this chapter will look at the debt Lucretius owes to the world of comedy, most obviously in the form of social satire in his depiction of love, politics and religion. If the world is a tragedy to the man who feels, it is also a comedy to the man who thinks: and nobody thinks about the world more than Lucretius.

The aesthetic stance of the wise man is after all more obviously close to comedy than to tragedy; comedy allows its audience to enjoy the spectacle of human misfortune with none of Bailey's agonising about 'egoism and even cruelty'¹. The butts of the poet's mockery include the foolish behaviour of the typical lover, the typical mourner, the typical politician, the typical superstitious man, the typical rich bored man, the typical rustic; as well as the specific mockery of named Presocratics and mythical 'heroes' such as Hercules and Dionysus. There are elements of comic style as well as these instances of comic material to be analysed.

SATIRE

Some of this is in the satiric tradition of the diatribe satire with its *spoudogeloion* mixture of laughter and serious moralising². This aspect of Lucretius has received scant attention since Murley's important article in 1939 and Dudley's short piece in 1965. Murley noted the quantity of satire in the text and even lists the relevant passages as follows:

1.80-101, 635-44, 1021-2; 2.11-58, 973-990, 1095-1104; 3. 41-93, 870-1094; 4. 469-521, 1121-1191; 5. 195-234, 1007-1010, 1115-1135; 6. 17-23, 379-422.

One could disagree with some of these passages³ and include others⁴, but he carries his case that the satiric element amounts to at least 10% of the whole and is therefore not to be ignored - and his list is perhaps conservative and underestimates the amount of satire to be found.

The immediate problem is one of definition. Murley's line of argument is to find passages in the *DRN* which were imitated by later satirists and thus locate Lucretius' place in the tradition on the implied assumption that if later satirists imitate him, then they must see him as a satirist too; Dudley⁵ on the other hand contents himself with going

¹ Bailey (1947) ii. 797

² *ridentem dicere verum* Horace *Sat.* 1.1.24

³ I have reservations about including: 1.80-101 (Iphigeneia), 1.1021-2, 5. 1115-35, 6.17-23

⁴ e.g. 1.102-126, 705-920; 2.500-514, 598-660, 1164-74; 4. 580-94, 962-1006, 1058-1114, 1137-1191; 5. 13-42, 156-94, 988-1006

⁵ Dudley (1965)

through those passages of the text which contain elements of all sorts of humour and social criticism; he thus implies that 'satire' is the same thing as these two, especially when combined together. Satire is of course difficult to define; Quintilian⁶ straightforwardly defines such poetry in historical terms as beginning with Lucilius and going on to Horace. He, like many others⁷, ignores Lucretius' place in the tradition. Dudley sees the need to 'bring into sharper focus the debt of Lucretius to Lucilius'⁸ but devotes to this a mere two pages.⁹

Johnson's dictionary gets to the point when he defines satire as a poem 'in which wickedness or folly is censured', although there is usually also a mood of enjoyment of such censure, whether the enjoyment is laughter or merely prurience. The *OCD*¹⁰ defines the term for Roman literature as: 'a humorous or malicious exposé of hypocrisy and pretension', a definition which will suit Lucretius well, as his ethical stance has a great deal to say about hypocrisy and pretension - *eripitur persona: manet res*.¹¹ For if the conclusions of Chapter 2 are accepted, and if ethics is for Lucretius a matter of perceiving the truth and then acting upon it, then we can expect his attitude towards vice to be to see it as subsumed under folly. The tragic heroes whom we looked at in the previous chapter were people who went wrong by failing to see the truth and incurred disaster; so also the butt of Lucretius' humour is the person who ignores the truth and makes

6 10.1.93
 7 see Murley (1939) 380
 8 Dudley (1965) 115
 9 Dudley (1965) 124-5

a fool of himself in a 'comedy of errors'. The difference between the two will be the attitude of the poet and the reader towards the suffering depicted: we do not feel particularly sorry for the romantic lover wasting his father's money on a worthless woman¹², but we are clearly meant to feel pity for the suffering of Iphigeneia¹³, rather as the plot of many a comedy (e.g. *Curculio*) would end up a tragedy of incestuous guilt like *Oedipus the King* were the plot to delay the recognition of the truth too much.

If this is so, then we can in turn expect his satirical voice to be mockery of the fool rather than the castigation of the wicked; of the Epicurean poet it could also be said, as Horace said of Lucilius¹⁴, that he *sale multo/ urbem defricuit*; but Lucretius' attitude is more one of *tout comprendre, c'est tout pardonner* in his resolute determination to show us the truth. Satire is always something of a mirror in which the audience (including the narrator himself¹⁵) may expect too see themselves reflected and learn from it - and the didactic tone of Lucilius is certainly comparable to Lucretius. Lucilius, for instance, engages the reader with the benefits of philosophy in Book 15: he attacks the superstitious belief in *portenta*:

multi homines portenta in Homeri versibus ficta
monstra putent; quorum in primis Polyphemus ducentos
Cyclops longus pedes; et porro huic maius bacillum

-
- 10 *OCD* (1996) s.v. 'Satire'
 11 3. 58
 12 4. 1129-30
 13 1. 80-101; I am surprised that Murley counts this passage as 'satire'
 14 *Sat.* 1.10.3-4
 15 e.g. Lucilius 929-30W, Horace *Sat.* 1.5. etc

quam malus navi in corbita maximus ulla¹⁶

and even closer to Lucretius he compares the superstitious to children:

Terriculas Lamias, Fauni quas Pompiliique
instituere Numae, tremit has hic omnia ponit.
ut pueri infantes credunt signa omnia aena
vivere et esse homines, sic isti somnia ficta
vera putant, credunt signis cor inesse in aenis.
Pergula pictorum, veri nil, omnia ficta.¹⁷

For Lucretius' attitude to *portenta* see 4. 590-594:

cetera de genere hoc monstra ac portenta loquuntur
ne loca deserta ab divis quoque forte putentur
sola tenere. ideo iactant miracula dictis
aut aliqua ratione alia ducuntur, ut omne
humanum genus est avidum nimis auricularum

where the poet adds the cynical assertion that superstition arises firstly because these people cannot bear to face the fact that not even gods live in their remote regions and they are all alone (*sola* is stressed) and secondly because people are gullible.

It is however with ethical matters that we are most concerned in this thesis, and Lucilius (even in his fragmentary state) has plenty of ethical comment to offer: his attitude to sexual love, for instance, was as cynical as anything in the *de rerum natura*: he seems to have shared Cato's view of the virtues of brothels¹⁸ and in the following passage he demythologises the 'beauties' of myth and legend:

num censes calliplocamon callisphyron ullah
non licitum esse uterum atque etiam inguina tangere mammis,
conpernem aut varam fuisse Amphitryonis acoetin
Alcmenam atque alias, Helenam ipsam denique - nolo

¹⁶ fragment 520-3W; all fragments of Lucilius are cited according to the Loeb edition of Warmington (1979)

¹⁷ frag. 524-9W; cf. DRN 2.55-58= 3. 87-90= 6.35-8

¹⁸ frag. 927-8W

dicere: tute vide atque dissylabon elige quodvis -
 κούρην eupatereiam aliquam rem insignem habuisse,
 verrucam naevum punctum dentem eminulum unum?¹⁹

which prompts immediate comparison with *DRN* 5. 13-42 for the demythologisation of the hero(ine) and also *DRN* 4 for the use of Greek euphemisms and the poet's *consolatio*:

nempe aliae quoque sunt; nempe hac sine viximus ante
 nempe eadem facit - et scimus facere - omnia turpi
 et miseram taetris se suffit odoribus ipsa
 quam famulae longe fugitant furtimque cachinnant²⁰

The satirist's attitude towards greed:

denique uti stulto nil sit satis, omnia cum sint²¹

is remarkably close to Epicurus' dictum that 'nothing is enough for the man for whom what is enough seems a little'²² and underlies Lucretius' mockery of the bored dissatisfied rich man²³ and the theme of ἀπλησία as in the allegorical explanation of the Danaids²⁴.

The unscrupulous striving for political power is sent up by Lucilius:

nunc vero a mani ad noctem festo atque profesto
 totus item pariterque die populusque patresque
 iactare indu foro se omnes, decedere nusquam;
 uni se atque eidem studio omnes dedere et arti -
 verba dare ut caute possint, pugnare dolose,
 blanditia certare, bonum simulare virum se,
 insidias facere ut si hostes sint omnibus omnes.²⁵

in language whose tone is later recalled by Lucretius:

denique avarities et honorum caeca cupido
 quae miseros homines cogunt transcendere fines

-
- 19 frag. 567-73W from a book lampooning the *Odyssey*
 20 4. 1173-6
 21 frag. 591W
 22 Epicurus fragment 68
 23 3. 1060-67
 24 3. 1003-1010
 25 frag. 1145-51W

iuris et interdum socios scelerum atque ministros
 noctes atque dies niti praestante labore
 ad summas emergere opes, haec vulnera vitae
 non minimam partem mortis formidine aluntur.
 turpis enim ferme contemptus et acris egestas
 semota ab dulci vita stabilique videtur
 et quasi iam leti portas cunctarier ante;
 unde homines dum se falso terrore coacti
 effugisse volunt longe longeque remosse,
 sanguine civili rem conflant divitiasque
 conduplicant avidi, caedem caede accumulantes,
 crudeles gaudent in tristi funere fratris
 et consanguineum mensas odere timentque.²⁶

The 'ethical' distance between these two extracts is instructive. Lucilius points out the wickedness, while Lucretius attempts to explain it away as being reducible to the fear of death. Both poets enjoy the view of the 'rat race'²⁷, but only Lucretius finds a way to explain the observed facts by means of the known facts of human nature. Lucilius clearly knew and wrote of Epicurus²⁸ but it is impossible to place him in any philosophical school, any more than Horace²⁹. The autobiographical elements in both poets are part of the satiric tradition; but in Lucilius it becomes the telling of anecdote such as the narrative of a journey³⁰ or an amorous escapade³¹ while for Lucretius the *persona* is always that of the didactic poet pointing to observed features of the world or sharing his experience of writing itself³².

²⁶ 3. 59-73

²⁷ the comic touches of Lucilius: the high-flown *populus patresque* are all crooks, the comic hyperbole of 'from morning till night, nowhere leaving...all of them', the reminiscence of Strepsiades in Aristophanes' *Clouds* in *verba dare ut caute possint*, the hypocrisy of *bonum simulare virum se*, and so on. For detailed analysis of the Lucretius passage see above pp. 28-42

²⁸ cf. frag. 820 'eidola atque atomus vincere Epicuri volam'

²⁹ famously eclectic; *Epistles* 1.1.14

³⁰ frag. 102-5W; cf. Horace *Sat* 1.5

³¹ frag. 898-9W

³² e.g. 4. 969-70

There are of course major differences between Lucilius and Lucretius: Lucilius engages in topical satire of named individuals (such as the mock-trials of Lentulus Lupus and Mucius Scaevola) whereas Lucretius avoids such contemporary jibes. Literary satire is Lucilius' genre, while for Lucretius it is merely one means to a protreptic end.

ROMAN COMEDY

Eupolis atque Cratinus Aristophanesque poetae,
 atque alii quorum comoedia prisca virorum est,
 si quis erat dignus describi quod malus ac fur,
 quod moechus foret aut sicarius aut alioqui
 famosus, multa cum libertate notabant.
 hinc omnis pendet Lucilius, hosce secutus
 mutatis tantum pedibus numerisque.³³

Literary satire such as that of Lucilius clearly depends on Stage Comedy, as asserted by Horace, and is eclipsed by it in social and literary importance. The readership of satire was small compared to the vast numbers who filled the theatre, and it would be surprising if Lucretius did not make use of this abundant source of material, just as Cicero was wont to do in his political speeches and treatises.

One clear example of Lucretius' use of such material is in his account of romantic love. Book 4 depicts the life of love in a grossly exaggerated and overtly theatrical manner; the lover is hardly the 'normal' Roman but a figure cut from comedy, with his serenades, his

³³

Horace *Sat* 1.4.1-7

flowers, his wasting of his father's money, his idealised infatuation for the beloved. This passage has often been seen as evidence for the behaviour of real Romans in the late Republic³⁴ on the grounds that Lucretius would not tilt at windmills and thereby ruin the plausibility of his satire - although he is happy to tilt at the windmills of kings slaughtering their daughters. Horace similarly satirises the lover of *libertinae* Sallustius in a satire whose main thrust is directed at 'insane romanticism'³⁵. This is treading close to the familiar 'life vs literature' argument which has engaged critics for many years and whose main premises do not need to be repeated here³⁶. The rather crude distinction between 'real life' and 'literature' will not do justice to the debate here: if both Lucretius and Roman comedy are satirising the same foolish behaviour, it is impossible to say to what extent either is imitating the other or to what extent either is reflecting 'reality'. It does seem however in principle likely that Lucretius' reader would have experience of this sort of folly as a spectacle on the comic stage more than on the *via Appia*, and that Horace's text differs from Lucretius in that he actually names his quarry (unlike Lucretius who remains steadfastly imprecise and generalised). There are a great many sources for the 'foolish lover' figure in stage comedy³⁷ from Lucretius' own day: young rich foolish men infatuated with girls and spending their fathers'

³⁴ e.g. Lyne (1980), 3, 13

³⁵ Horace *Satires* 1.2: phrase from Lyne (1980) 13

³⁶ see e.g. Griffin (1985) 1-31, 48-64

³⁷ listed and discussed in Rosivach (1980)

money on them³⁸, the life of youthful *desidia*³⁹ given over to parties, drinking and gaming⁴⁰, the traditional Roman priority of *negotium* and *officia* over this sort of *otium* being rejected in favour of idle folly⁴¹ and leaving the lover still wretched and *miser*, whether because they are aware of their folly or because of jealousy of rivals⁴². Typical of this way of life is young Phaedromus in Plautus' *Curculio*, for instance, deeply and foolishly in love, and singing a *paraklausithyron*⁴³ such as Lucretius' sad lover offers⁴⁴, or Lysidamas in *Casina* who is even more foolishly in love on account of his age and the farcical humiliation to which the play subjects him. *Casina* is said to be insane - as are all romantic lovers, Lucretius would urge - and then the old man finds that what he thinks is his beloved is in fact his slave in drag (a nice example of an actor acting a part within a part) - only to be betrayed by his own bailiff Olympio. *Amphitryo* sees the wretched Alcmena seduced by Jupiter in the guise of her husband Amphitryo, deceived by appearances by a being whom we are told to worship - again a neat combination of Lucretius' twin preoccupations with superstition and hallucination. In matters of romantic love, one can trust neither one's servants nor one's senses, it seems, and the whole business reeks with deception and self-seeking (on the part of Jupiter for instance), while

³⁸ for the gifts to girls (Lucretius 4. 1125-30) cf. Plautus *Cist.* 487, *Men.* 739, *Miles G.* 1109, 1302, *Truc.* 52: for the spending of father's money (Lucr. 4. 1129) cf. Plautus *Merc.* 42-58, *Trin.* 13, 682, Naevius *com.* 84 Ribb..

³⁹ *desidiose agere aetatem* 4.1136

⁴⁰ 4. 1131-2: cf. Terence *Ad.* 117, Plautus *Most.* 295, 309, *Asin.* 803.

⁴¹ 4. 1123-4: cf. Plautus *Trin.* 261, 651, *Most.* 144.

⁴² guilty conscience: 4.1133-6, Plautus *Merc.* 79-82, *Most.* 149-56, *Trin.* 655-9. Fear of rivals: 4. 1137-40, Terence *H.T.* 256-63, Plautus *Asin.* 792, 769-70.

⁴³ 264-279

the real happiness which all of them seek could only be obtained by knowledge such as Epicurus offers. Their folly leads inexorably to humiliation and sadness. Phaedromus in *Curculio* could well be the model for Lucretius' scathing sketch⁴⁵:

at lacrimans exclusus amator limina saepe
floribus et sertis operit postisque superbos
unguit amaracino et foribus miser oscula figit

where the poet exercises all his satirical force in the mockery of the lover: the lover performs three actions (covering with flowers, smearing with marjoram, implanting kisses) on three words for doors (*limina...postes...foribus*) complete with the pathetic fallacy of a door as haughty as the mistress it protects (*superbos*). There is an excruciating loss of dignity on the part of the lover which is reinforced by the disillusion suggested in the following passage:

quem si, iam ammissum, venientem offenderit aura
una modo, causas abeundi quaerat honestas
et meditata diu cadat alte sumpta querella,
stultitiaque ibi se damnet, tribuisse quod illi
plus videat quam mortali concedere par est.⁴⁶

where again the key idea of the superstitious attribution of divine power to a mortal is brought out by the vital word *videat*: as with all things, seeing the truth is everything you need. In this case the truth is hyperbolically awful: a mistress whose 'divine'⁴⁷ aura in fact is a foul bodily odour⁴⁸, one breath of which will have him looking for a decent excuse to leave the woman he has importuned for so long, his sincere

⁴⁴ 4. 1177-9, quoted below: on the topos see Copley (1956)

⁴⁵ 4. 1177-9

⁴⁶ 4. 1180-4

⁴⁷ cf. *Veneres* at 1185, discussed below.

and long-considered lament evoked in a parodistically lengthy Latin phrase (*meditata diu..alte sumpta querella*) but falling to bits in two short syllables (*cadat*). The comedy is obvious, and one might further compare the opening scene of Terence's *Eunuch*. In both texts the lover exhibits 'a...mixture of desire, anger, irresolution and self-reproach.⁴⁹

The poet consciously uses a theatrical metaphor in describing the secret truth behind the fake beauty of the society madam as her *vitae post scaenia*⁵⁰, a word only occurring here in extant Latin and anticipating the later use of *scaena* to indicate histrionic and deceitful behaviour⁵¹, while also playing on the similarity with *obscena* which better describes the back-stage realities which these ironically entitled 'goddesses of love'⁵² seek to keep hidden. This completes the ironic circle as he depicts a scene familiar from drama which however points out the cosmetic and meretricious theatricality of the 'real-life' women whose love the reader is urged to avoid. The irony deepens when one realises that in the theatre everybody knows that the person on stage is only playing a part, whereas these people are believed to be acting sincerely but really *are* playing a role - actresses of insincere love - and

⁴⁸ *aura* picks up the point of 1175-6; the giggling maids are referred to again at 1189, neatly providing closure for this satirical passage.

⁴⁹ R.D. Brown (1987) 136

⁵⁰ 4. 1186

⁵¹ OLD s.v. 'scaena' 5

so offer the lover nothing substantial except the images. What is more, crediting these superficial women with divine powers is another form of the superstition which it is the poet's aim to dispel. The theatrical irony of *postscaenia*, then reminds us of the manner in which Roman comedy indulged in *Stimmungsbrechung* of the same kind, as where Charinus opens the *Mercator* with a dig at other comedies:

non ego item facio ut alios in comoediis
vi vidi amoris facere, qui aut Nocti aut Di
aut Soli aut Lunae miserias narrant suas

a feature of Aristophanic comedy⁵³; or where Mercury opens the *Amphitryo* claiming to be able to change the genre if the audience wishes⁵⁴. Beacham sums up this aspect of 'generic self-consciousness' as 'the sense of a consummate control of the theatrical medium, through which both audience and performers are involved in a carefully coordinated and integrated aesthetic act.'⁵⁵ The *de rerum natura* is precisely such an 'integrated aesthetic act' in the self-conscious discussion of 'deception'⁵⁶ of its protreptic.

The relevance of this to the rest of book 4 - and the reason for concluding book 4 with the diatribe against love - is that the lover is an extreme version of the 'hallucinating' man who does not use his senses to the full and who misinterprets the evidence. Just as we could be fooled by optical illusions (the bent oar, etc, of 4.324-468) if we did not

⁵² the term *Venus* for a mistress had already been found in the mouth of the besotted lover in Plautus *Curculio* 192: it is later used by Horace (*Odes* 1.27.14; 33.13) and - in the mouth of another besotted lover - Vergil (*Eclogues* 3.68).

⁵³ e.g. *Frogs* 1-34, *Clouds* 535-62, *Wasps* 54-66, *Peace* 739-47

⁵⁴ *Amphitruo* 51-63

⁵⁵ Beacham (1991) 42-3

⁵⁶ of the reader with the honey (4.1-25); see pp. 85-6 above

'correct' our sense-data with the interpretation of the mind, so the lover is fooled by appearances into believing that his beloved is perfect even when her blemishes are all too apparent to the impartial observer⁵⁷. Love, in this sense, is the product of a failure to see the truth. As in the theatrical predecessors whom we have cited, truth is established at the end of the book and the comedy of errors is rectified by the light of reality: in much the same way, Lucretius in Book 4 gives us our own comedy of the senses⁵⁸, allowing us to enjoy the comic spectacle of uneducated senses and illusions before facing the far preferable reality of seeing the truth and settling down to (scientifically informed) child-rearing⁵⁹ with a good woman rather than the vain and frustrated pursuit of the evil meretricious mistress. The book adopts comic stereotypes and ends happily with the optimistic motto that pertinacity will be rewarded:

quod superest, consuetudo concinnat amorem;
nam leviter quamvis quod crebro tunditur ictu,
vincitur in longo spatio tamen atque labascit.
nonne vides etiam guttas in saxa cadentis
umoris longo in spatio pertundere saxa?⁶⁰

where the repetition of the actions is well brought out by the repetition of words (*in longo spatio...longo in spatio: saxa...saxa; tunditur...pertundere*). The ending of book four has often been seen

⁵⁷ 4.1153-1170

⁵⁸ the series of optical illusions dwelt on (324-461) and yet also explained away by the *ratio* of the philosophy; the illusions thus become almost like artworks to be admired and yet seen through.

⁵⁹ hence the poet's ending of the book with advice on conception and heredity at 4. 1192-1287

⁶⁰ 4. 1283-7

as neurotic⁶¹ and disturbed - in fact it is only as neurotic and disturbed as many a comedy⁶² and ends with the light of truth revealed and a bright future available to all. Just as tragedy allows us to enjoy watching other people suffer⁶³, comedy allows us to find it funny; and just as the actors on the comic stage cannot tell Mercury apart from Sosia or Jupiter from Amphitrúo but the audience can easily do so, so also the 'audience' of the *de rerum natura* sees through the deception and can enjoy the comedy safe in the knowledge of the truth.

One of the most celebrated passages of social satire in the book is the catalogue of euphemisms used to paint the beloved in a better light than she merits:

nigra 'melichrus' est, immunda et fetida 'acosmos',
caesia 'Palladium', nervosa et lignea 'dorcás'
parvula pumilio 'chariton mia' 'tota merum sal',
magna atque immanis 'cataplexis plenaque honoris'.
balba loqui non quit - 'traulizi'; muta 'pudens' est.
at flagrans odiosa loquacula 'Lampadium' fit;
'ischnon eromenion' tum fit cum vivere non quit
prae macie; 'rhadine' verost iam mortua tussi;
at tumida et mammosa 'Ceres' est 'ipsa ab Iaccho',
simula 'Silena ac saturast', labeosa 'philema'.⁶⁴

The immediate source of this passage usually quoted is Plato *Republic* 474d4-475a2:

ἀνδρὶ δ' ἐρωτικῷ οὐ πρέπει ἀμνημονεῖν ὅτι πάντες οἱ ἐν
ᾧ ῥα τὸν φιλόπαιδα καὶ ἐρωτικὸν ἀμῆ γέ πη δάκνουσί τε καὶ
κινουσι, δοκοῦντες ἄξιοι εἶναι ἐπιμελείας τε καὶ τοῦ
ἀσπάζεσθαι. ἢ οὐχ οὕτω ποιεῖτε πρὸς τοὺς καλοὺς; ὁ μὲν, ὅτι
σιμός, ἐπίχαρις κληθεὶς ἐπαινεθήσεται ὑφ' ὑμῶν, τοῦ δὲ τὸ
γρυπὸν βασιλικόν φατε εἶναι, τὸν δὲ δὴ διὰ μέσου τούτων

61 e.g. St Jerome: Perelli (1969)

62 e.g. Plautus *Casina*

63 as we saw in the previous chapter in the discussion of Gorgias (pp. 147-8 above)

64 4. 1160-69

ἐμμετρώτατα ἔχειν, μέλανας δὲ ἀνδρικοὺς ἰδεῖν, λευκοὺς δὲ θεῶν παῖδας εἶναι· μελιχλῶρους δὲ καὶ τοῦνομα οἶει πνὸς ἄλλου ποίημα εἶναι ἢ ἐραστοῦ ὑποκοριζομένου τε καὶ εὐχερῶς φέροντος τὴν ὠχρότητα, ἐὰν ἐπὶ ὥρᾳ ᾗ; καὶ ἐνὶ λόγῳ πάσας προφάσεις προφασίζεσθε τε καὶ πάσας φωνὰς ἀφίετε, ὥστε μηδένα ἀποβάλλειν τῶν ἀνθούτων ἐν ὥρᾳ.

This passage does of course resemble our text in many ways, and one could add Thucydides account of the 'reevaluation of terms' in the *stasis* chapters of his *History*⁶⁵: but a closer parallel to the Lucretian theme is to be found in a fragment of a comedy of Alexis, discussed by Domenicucci⁶⁶:

πρῶτα μὲν γὰρ πρὸς τὸ κέρδος καὶ τὸ συλᾶν τοὺς πέλας
πάντα τᾶλλ' αὐταῖς πάρεργα γίνεται, ράπτουσι δέ
πᾶσιν ἐπιβουλὰς· ἐπειδὰν δ' εὐπορήσωσιν ποτε
ἀνέλαβον καινὰς ἐταίρας πρωτοπειροῦς τῆς τέχνης.
εὐθὺς ἀναπλάττουσι ταύτας ὥστε μήτε τοὺς τρόπους
μήτε τὰς ὄψεις ὁμοίᾳς διατελεῖν οὔσας ἔτι.
τυγχάνει μικρά τις οὔσα, φελλὸς ἐν ταῖς βαυκίσιν
ἐγκεκάτνται· μακρά τις, διάβαθρον λεπτὸν φορεῖ
τὴν τε κεφαλὴν ἐπὶ τὸν ὦμον καταβαλοῦσ' ἐξέρχεται
τοῦτο τοῦ μήκους ἀφεῖλεν. οὐκ ἔχει τις ἰσχία
ὑπενέδυσ' ἐρραμέν' αὐτήν, ὥστε τὴν εὐπυγίαν
ἀναβοᾶν τοὺς εἰσιδόντας. κοιλίαν ἀδρὰν ἔχει,
στηθὶ ἔστ' αὐταῖσι τούτων ὧν ἔχουσ' οἱ κωμικοί·
ὀρθὰ προσθεῖσαι τοιαῦτα τοῦνδυτον τῆς κοιλίας
ὥσπερ εἰ κοντοῖσι τούτοις εἰς τὸ πρόσθ' ἀπήγαγον.
τὰς ὀφρῦς πυρρὰς ἔχει τις, ζωγραφοῦσιν ἀσβόλῳ.
συμβέβηκ' εἶναι μέλαιναν, κατέπλασε ψιμυθίῳ.
λευκόχρως λίαν τίς ἐστι, παιδέρωτ' ἐντρίβεται.
καλὸν ἔχει τοῦ σώματος τι, τοῦτο γυμνὸν δείκνυται.
εὐφυεῖς ὀδόντας ἔσχεν, ἐξ ἀνάγκης δεῖ γελᾶν,
ἵνα θεωρῶσ' οἱ παρόντες τὸ στόμ' ὡς κομνὸν φορεῖ.
ἂν δὲ μὴ χαίρη γελῶσα, διατελεῖ τὴν ἡμέραν
ἔνδον, ὥσπερ τοῖς μαγείροις ἃ παρὰ κειθ' ἐκάστοτε,
ἡνίκ' ἂν πωλῶσιν αἰγῶν κρανία, ξυλήφιον
μυρρίνης ἔχουσα λεπτὸν ὀρθὸν ἐν τοῖς χεῖλεσιν,
ὥστε τῷ χρόνῳ σέσηρεν, ἂν τε βούλητ' ἂν τε μή.

⁶⁵ Thucydides 3. 82-83

⁶⁶ Alexis Fr. 98 Edmunds, discussed by Domenicucci (1981)

the subject of the verbs is either the pimps who decorate their girls to allure customers, or the girls themselves: the satire reveals the tricks of the trade (cork in the shoes of short girls, low slippers for the tall, rouge for the pale girl, whitelead for the dark complexion, rubbing soot on red eyebrows, etc.) and amuses while it unmasks the deception. The verbal parallels with Lucretius are close⁶⁷ and the situation of the 'beauty' being not even skin-deep but applied as a costume suits both the theatrical depiction of love in the poem and also the comic purpose of this text. It may be that the topos explored by Alexis was imitated in Roman comedy (it is hard to believe that it was not); at any rate, there is a direct theatrical source for this most famous section of the diatribe against romantic love - a source which also removes some of the grim seriousness with which Lucretius' account of love has often been invested by critics. As often, the serious point is made through a light-hearted piece of humour, the theatricality of love being shown (with typical irony) by an allusion to a passage from a theatrical text.

Religion (or better Superstition) is also handled in a similar manner. As described earlier, comedy is used to satirise the practice of superstition. The pathetic impotent man, for instance:

nec divina satum genitalem numina cuiquam
absterrent, pater a gnatis ne dulcibus umquam
appelletur et ut sterili Venere exigat aevum;
quod plerumque putant et multo sanguine maesti
conspargunt aras adolentque altaria donis

⁶⁷ μέλαιναν = nigra 1160, μικρά = parvula 1162, μακρά = magna atque immanis, κοιλίαν ἄδραν = tumida et mammosa 1168.

ut gravidas reddant uxores semine largo.
nequiquam divom numen sortisque fatigant⁶⁸...

Here the poet mocks both the man's sentimental desire for children with the sardonic *dulcibus* and exaggerates his wretched attempts to placate the gods with the hyperbolic gifts of 1237, all so that he might render his wife 'heavy' with a grotesque amount of seed, belabouring the *numen* when all he needs is *semen*. This is the sort of caricature which we expect to find in comedy and which lurks behind the impotent man in (e.g.) Catullus 67 who needs his more robust father to deflower his virgin bride - a scenario reminiscent of father-son rivalry for a girl in (e.g.) Plautus' *Asinaria*.

The depiction of the gods in comedy is light-hearted and debunking, especially in the *Amphitruo*. The Father of Gods and Men is built up and then run down by his son Mercury as a weak mortal in the *Amphitruo*:

Iovi' iussu venio: nomen Mercuriost mihi:
pater huc me misit ad vos oratum meus:
tam etsi pro imperio vobis quod dictum foret
scibat facturos, quippe qui intellexerat
vereri vos se et metuere, ita ut aequom est Iovem;
verum profecto hoc petere me precario
a vobis iussit leniter dictis bonis.
etenim ille quovis huc iussu venio, Iuppiter
non minus quam vostrum quivis formidat malum:
humana matre natus, humano patre
mirari non est aequom sibi si praetimet;
atque ego quoque etiam, qui Iovis sum filius,
contagione mei patris metuo malum.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ 4.1233-1239

⁶⁹ *Amphitruo* 19-31

This is surprising, asserts Segal⁷⁰, in view of the Roman *δεισιδαμονία*⁷¹; what, he asks, would be the reaction of Plautus' audience to Agorastocles' outburst:

ita me di amabunt, ut ego, si sim Iuppiter
iam hercle ego illam uxorem ducam et Iunonem extrudam foras!⁷²

'we imagine with horror Punch and Judy on Olympus' he comments: 'even at his most irreverent moments, Aristophanes never abuses Hera'⁷³. The argument from Aristophanes is weak: we only have a proportion of his comedies, and female gods such as Iris in the *Birds* come in for abuse. Dover⁷⁴ is probably right when he asserts that 'fifth-century comedy provided an outlet for this kind of self-assertion by depicting deities not only as worsted by aggressive humans, as in *Birds*, but also as stupid, greedy and cowardly... he (the ordinary Greek) did not ask himself "What is the nature of a god who expects sacrifices but accepts mockery?"' Lucretius' view of the gods will be examined in the final chapter: it is obvious however that his anti-theological stance which ridicules divine agency in the world is close to the irreverent world of comedy, old and new. In Rome as in Athens the plays passed off with no thunderbolts or playwrights prosecuted for blasphemy - an indication surely that the ancient tolerance of blasphemy was greater than we (or Polybius) think, and that Lucretian ridicule of divine intervention was perhaps less daring than one might suppose.

⁷⁰ Segal (1968) 30-31

⁷¹ citing Polybius 6.56.7

⁷² *Poenulus* 1219-20

⁷³ Segal (1968) 30-1.

The ridicule of divine intervention is repeated many times⁷⁵ as is the corresponding advice not to seek the help of the gods as it is useless⁷⁶. Elsewhere, the poet uses satire taken from Greek comedy to discredit pathetic arguments in support of superstitious beliefs, most obviously his rehearsal of a sequence of arguments from Aristophanes *Clouds* applied to the divine origin of thunderbolts⁷⁷; the argument from the fact that wicked men are untouched by the thunderbolt of Jupiter although he is said to shoot at sinners, while the innocent are hit⁷⁸, coupled with the fact that he often hits his own temples or oak trees⁷⁹, and the argument against the divine origin of rain from the necessity of a cloudy sky⁸⁰. These arguments are augmented by comic original touches of the poet's own: the cartoon-like picture of the gods using thunderbolt-throwing as a form of exercise⁸¹ and the subsequent obscenity of Jupiter 'blunting his bolt'⁸² followed by the caricature of Jupiter the bad marksman squatting low in the clouds to get a better shot at the target, complete with a *double entendre* as he 'enters' the clouds and there 'aims the blows of his weapon'⁸³. Jupiter is sent up in lines 404-5:

quid undas
arguit et liquidam molem camposque natantis?

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- 74 Dover (1972) 32-3
75 1. 152-4, 2. 167-83, 2. 1090-1104, 4. 1233-9, 5. 76-90, 5. 110-234, 6. 59-89, 6. 379-422
76 e.g. 4. 1233-9, 6. 1272-1277
77 6. 379-422
78 Aristophanes *Clouds* 397-400; *DRN* 6. 391-5
79 *Clouds* 401-2 = *DRN* 6. 417-22, 2. 1101-4
80 *Clouds* 368-71 = *DRN* 6. 400-1
81 6. 397
82 6. 398
83 6. 402-3; the clouds of Aristophanes were distinctly female (*Clouds* 341)

in the inflated rhetoric of the tricolon crescendo, the three phrases being precisely the sort of inflated rhetoric which *arguit* suggests; Jupiter is a barrister flinging verbal assaults of vapid rhetoric against an innocent sea - words as futile as his thunderbolts. There is also clever sophistry to prove that Jupiter is either not acting or else is very stupid in the way that thunder signals the thunderbolt and so gives us time to get out of the way; and there is the parody of epic style in the depiction of the sinner struck by the thunderbolt of Jupiter:

quod si Iuppiter atque alii fulgentia divi
terrifico quatiunt sonitu caelestia templa
et iaciunt ignem quo cuiquest cumque voluntas
cur quibus incautum scelus aversabile cumquest
non faciunt icti flammis ut fulguris halent
pectore perfixo, documen mortalibus acre...⁸⁴

the high-flown language of the gods⁸⁵ and the punishment of the sinner⁸⁶ are brought out for parodistic purpose and to be dismissed in the tart *documen mortalibus acre* where Lucretius suggests that the thunderbolt might indeed be a lesson to mortals if the gods used it morally and consistently. This is also, however, comedy versus tragedy and epic, as the 'theological' interpretation of thunderbolts finds its finest expression in Aeschylus⁸⁷ and Hesiod⁸⁸ as well as the Romans Accius⁸⁹ and Varro Atacinus⁹⁰. Again, the poet is prepared to use themes and ideas well-known from Greek and Roman drama rather than inventing more original or philosophical concepts with which to

⁸⁴ 6. 388-92

⁸⁵ Ernout compares Ennius *Scaenica* 380 *templa caeli summa sonitu concutit* with 388

⁸⁶ cf. Accius' in *pectore/ fulmen incohatum flammam ostentabat Iovis*

⁸⁷ *Seven against Thebes* 444f, *Agamemnon* 468-70

⁸⁸ *Theogony* 820-880

⁸⁹ Accius frag. 241-2W (from *Clytemnestra*)

demonstrate his case, and (again) the supposedly serious and unsmiling Lucretius is quite prepared to use sources from the most irreverent genre in the ancient world (Old Comedy) to lend both weight and humour to his account of the world.

The comic connection does not cease with sex and religion. The exploration of bodily functions in general and sexual activity in particular is no stranger to comedy - as witnessed by all those who have sought to bowdlerise Aristophanes - and Lucretius' account of the physiology of sex in book 4 is a masterpiece of science and caricature mixed together - note the hyperbole of:

sic in amore Venus simulacris ludit amantis,
nec satiare queunt spectando corpora curam
nec manibus quicquam teneris abrasere membris
possunt errantes incerti corpore toto.
denique cum membris conlatis flore fruuntur 1105
aetatis, iam cum praesagit gaudia corpus
atque in eost Venus ut muliebria conserat arva,
adfigunt avidae corpus iunguntque salivas
oris et inspirant pressantes dentibus ora -
nequiquam, quoniam nil inde abrasere possunt 1110
nec penetrare et abire in corpus corpore toto;
nam facere interdum velle et certare videntur:
usque adeo cupide in Veneris compagibus haerent,
membra voluptatis dum vi labefacta liquescunt.
tandem ubi se erupit nervis conlecta cupido, 1115
parva fit ardoris violenti pausa parumper.
inde redit rabies eadem et furor ille revisit,
cum sibi quod cupiunt ipsi contingere quaerunt,
nec reperire malum id possunt quae machina vincat:
usque adeo incerti tabescunt vulnere caeco. 1120

⁹⁰ frag. 10 (Morel) (context unclear). For the topic of the thunderbolt as divine weapon see Blinkenberg (1911)

The quasi-scientific objectivity of (e.g.) *iunguntque salivas/ oris* fools nobody. The act of love-making becomes an attempt to remove parts of the lover's body (*abradere* 1103) even though the hands doing the deed are *teneris*, the exchange of saliva⁹¹ (1108) and the pressing of hard teeth against soft lips (1109). The obscene notion of the (male) lover disappearing into the body of the female (*abire in corpus corpore toto*) is a cartoon-like exaggeration; and never, one feels, has synecdoche been applied to the act of sex with such devastating reductive effect. There is no identification with the lovers here - no elegiac empathy with the feelings being described, but rather the gaze of the bemused philosopher watching the folly of his fellow human beings with the sort of detached incredulity which we find in the opening of book 2. And yet there is also effective imagery here - the passage opens with euphemistic imagery (*flore*⁹² *aetatis*, *muliebria arva*⁹³) before launching into an alarmingly explicit account of sex; here also the imagery is effective and appropriate - note the liquid image of *liquescit*, and the suitably contorted word order of 1119 expressive of the lovers' confusion. The depiction of the act is itself effective, but the passage is remarkable in its union of philosophical contemplation of a phenomenon and the comic exploitation of the absurdity of physical sex for literary purpose.

⁹¹ the point recalls the act of eating greedily: cf. 4. 1091-1100

⁹² see OLD s.v. 'flos' 8a

⁹³ see Adams (1982) 82-5 for parallels; cf. especially Plautus *Asinaria* 874, *Casina* 922, *Curculio* 56, *Truc.* 149

Ancient comedy is of course at least ostensibly didactic, and Aristophanes claims that the dramatic poets of Athens were seen by themselves and by their fellow-citizens as in some senses educators of their audience⁹⁴ and as people who could certainly have a great influence on the behaviour of the spectators⁹⁵. The same was also said of Homer⁹⁶, of course, and one remembers how Agamemnon left his wife Clytemnestra in the company of a poet to maintain her moral standards while he was away.⁹⁷ There is thus little if any compromise of the poem's didactic purpose for it to use the techniques and materials of the comic stage - and there is surely no better way to boost the morale of the poet's side than by mocking the philosophical opposition, such as we find in the mockery of Empedocles⁹⁸, Heraclitus⁹⁹, Anaxagoras¹⁰⁰, Thales perhaps¹⁰¹ and the Sceptics¹⁰² but interestingly not the Stoics¹⁰³. In most of these cases the philosophical refutation is done at least partly through ridicule: Heraclitus being ironically described as *clarus ob obscuram linguam* and then parodied, the Sceptic being back-to-front and upside down like a circus performer¹⁰⁴,

⁹⁴ Aristophanes *Frogs* 1009-10, cf. *Wasps* 64, Dover (1993) 16, Plato *Gorgias* 501e10-11

⁹⁵ although Dover is probably right to say ((1993) 16) that 'many, if not most Athenians would have assented to the general proposition that a tragic poet has a responsibility to "make his fellow citizens better people" (as demanded by Plato's Socrates in *Grg.* 501e), but that is not to say that they actually went to the theatre in the hope of moral improvement.'

⁹⁶ Plato *Ion* 540e-541b

⁹⁷ Homer *Odyssey* 3. 267-9: though West ((1988) 176-7) has her doubts about the significance of the term and suggests that the poet might be a singing eunuch

⁹⁸ 1. 734-829

⁹⁹ 1. 635-704

¹⁰⁰ 1. 830-920, on which see Brown (1983)

¹⁰¹ The lengthy account of the magnet at 6. 906-1089 is a disproof of Thales, who stated that 'magnets have souls'. On this see now Penwill ((1996) 157-8)

¹⁰² 4. 469-521

¹⁰³ see Furley (1966)

¹⁰⁴ 4.472, cf. Burnyeat (1978)

Empedocles the 'flawed visionary',¹⁰⁵ Anaxagoras being abused with a whole range of satirical techniques.¹⁰⁶ Once again, the didactic poet and the satirist blend together and turn the text into a piece of protreptic which both amuses and instructs, and which uses ridicule as one weapon in the destruction of the opposition. Lucretius in particular applies this comic tactic to his aesthetic ethical views - if the ethical ideal is pleasure and if ethics is a matter of contemplation rather than action, then it is not difficult to see why the poet should show us pleasing spectacles of comic fantasy as part of his construction of the 'good life' through his poetry.

We come back again to the vital passage which opens book 2. We saw in chapter 4 that the practice of cheering oneself up by comparing one's own sufferings with those of others is neither new or even particularly disgraceful, especially if one is a god; and one common response of the gods to suffering is laughter as in the comic theatre. Laughing at the misfortunes of others is the prerogative of gods in both Homer, where the Olympians amuse themselves at the wretched Hephaistos with his limp¹⁰⁷ and also in tragedy, where Athene encourages Odysseus to enjoy laughing at his enemy Ajax in his misfortune:

*οὐκ οὖν γέλωσ ἥδιστος εἰς ἐχθροὺς γελᾶν;*¹⁰⁸

105 Brown (1983) 149

106 fully described and documented in Brown (1983) 152-60

107 Homer *Iliad* 1. 600

108 Sophocles *Ajax* 79

just as Dionysus in Euripides' *Bacchae* mocks Pentheus before having him killed. Medea asks the messenger to narrate slowly the tale of the deaths she has caused for the sake of pleasure: 'you would please me twice as much if they died horribly'¹⁰⁹. More obviously, this sort of laughter is proper to comedy, especially in topical cases of public embarrassment causing mirth such as Cleonymus' throwing away his shield at the battle of Delium¹¹⁰ and Cleisthenes' inability to grow a beard¹¹¹. There is scope for inquiring if Lucretius here, in turning the tables on the rich and powerful, is not indulging in what Dover calls comic 'self-assertion'¹¹² over against those who appear to have everything but who in fact are more vulnerable than the poor man in the street - just as he mocks the useless luxuries of the rich which have no effect against disease¹¹³.

There are then other comic parallels for this sort of *Schadenfreude*. Athenaeus¹¹⁴ quotes a passage of the comic poet Timocles which is of more than passing similarity to Lucretius in thought:

ὦ τᾶν, ἄκουσον ἥν τί σοι μέλλω λέγειν.
 ἄνθρωπος ἐστὶ ζῶον ἐπίπονον φύσει
 καὶ πολλὰ λυπὴρ ὁ βίος ἐν ἑαυτῷ φέρει.
 παραψυχὰς οὖν φροντίδων ἀνεύρετο
 ταύτας· ὁ γὰρ νοῦς τῶν ἰδίων λήθην λαβὼν
 πρὸς ἀλλοτρίῳ τε ψυχαγωγηθεὶς πάθει,
 μεθ' ἡδονῆς ἀπῆλθε παιδευθεὶς ἅμα.
 τοὺς γὰρ τραγωδοὺς πρῶτον, εἰ βούλει, σκόπει,
 ὥς ὠφελοῦσι πάντας. ὁ μὲν ὦν γὰρ πένης

¹⁰⁹ Euripides *Medea* 1134-5

¹¹⁰ e.g. Aristophanes *Wasps* 15-27, *Knights* 1369-72, *Clouds* 353, *Peace* 444-6, etc

¹¹¹ e.g. Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* 1092, *Clouds* 355 etc

¹¹² Dover (1972) 31-41

¹¹³ 2.34-6

¹¹⁴ 223

πτωχότερον αὐτοῦ καταμαθὼν τὸν Τήλεφον
 γενόμενον ἤδη τὴν πενίαν ῥᾶον φέρει·
 ὁ νοσῶν δὲ μανικῶς Ἀλκμέων ἐσκέψατο·
 ὀφθαλμιᾷ πῖς, εἰσὶ Φινεΐδαι τυφλοί.
 τέθνηκέ τῳ παῖς, ἡ Νιόβη κεκούφικε.
 χωλός τις ἐστὶ, τὸν Φιλοκτήτην ὄρᾳ.
 γέρων πῖς ἀτυχεῖ, κατέμαθεν τὸν Οἰνέα.
 ἅπαντα γὰρ τὰ μείζον' ἢ πέπονθε πῖς
 ἀτυχήματ' ἄλλοις γεγονότ' ἐννοούμενος
 τὰς αὐτὸς αὐτοῦ συμφορὰς ῥᾶον φέρει.

The enjoyment of this spectacle, in other words, is pure comedy fed by tragedy and suggests both the therapeutic value of seeing other people worse off than ourselves on the stage and also the pleasure of doing so. The theatrical medium is again the key element here; the audience watching a comic play refer to their experience of the tragic theatre and contemplate the idea of people putting their sufferings into perspective by watching the plays. The contemplation of the world of the theatre is thus itself therapeutic; but Lucretius, as we have seen, uses his theatrical material to show that the same attitude towards life is ethically the best one to adopt *outside* the theatre as well as in it.

This concludes our discussion of the theatre as metaphor, simile and source of material for the poem. No art-form in the ancient world had anything like the impact of the theatre; and in the late Roman republic the theatre was not merely the arena where fine literature was disseminated to vast crowds but also the place where ambitious politicians could stage vote-pulling shows - hence the importance of the aedileship in a political career and the significance of Pompey's new theatre in 55 B.C.¹¹⁵. The Roman triumph was an

¹¹⁵ probably dedicated within Lucretius' lifetime: his date of death was said to be Vergil's seventeenth birthday (15th October 53) (Donatus *Life of Vergil* 6)

obvious show of success, but the use of the *ludi* for demagogic purposes was particularly pronounced in Lucretius' lifetime¹¹⁶ and continued to be so used by Augustus and his successors. The theatre was also an arena for political protest such as we find in the case of Cicero in 58 BC¹¹⁷ as well as being a nice image for the political machine which elevated actors who could persuade their fellow citizens with powerful rhetoric. For any Roman living in the 1st century B.C. there was no medium to touch it for power and immediacy of effect; and Lucretius' use of the theatre as a metaphor for the aesthetic ethics he is propounding as well as a fund of literary imagery is therefore hardly surprising. The *de rerum natura* opens with a prominent paean to the goddess Venus - it may be significant that in the new theatre of Pompey there was 'the provision of a temple to Venus Victrix at the top and rear of the auditorium placed directly *vis-à-vis* the stage and *scaenae frons*'¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ well discussed by Beacham (1991) 133, 157-8, 163

¹¹⁷ Beacham (1991) 159

¹¹⁸ Beacham (1991) 161

CHAPTER EIGHT: THE DIVINE AUDIENCE

This thesis has examined the ethics of the poem and has attempted to show that the poet's ethical stance is one whereby ethics is a matter of seeing the truth about ourselves and whereby aesthetic contemplation of the world through philosophy is advocated rather than direct engagement in the world of politics, love and business. The wise man will appreciate the world as if watching a show in the theatre; and the reward promised him for his doing so is aesthetic pleasure which affords him serenity and happiness.

Yet the poet promises even more. After explaining the elements of different natures which man has inside him and which no amount of training can eradicate, such that one is prone to anger, another to fear, the poet makes a startling claim to offset the obvious objection that if character is fixed then 'conversion' - even conversion to Epicureanism - is impossible :

illud in his rebus video firmare potesse,
usque adeo naturarum vestigia linqui
parvola quae nequeat ratio depellere nobis
ut nil impediatur dignam dis degere vitam.¹

¹ 3. 319-322

The purpose of this final chapter is to examine how the aesthetic ethical ideals propounded by the poet qualify the wise man 'to lead a life worthy of the gods'.

Epicurus seems to have been certain that the gods do not represent any threat to us: their existence is not doubted if only because they impinge on our experience both when awake and when dreaming, and all perceptions are in some sense true at least to the point that all physical events must have a physical cause², and yet whatever the intrinsic nature of the material things which cause the perceptions of gods, Epicurus is at least certain that they do not concern themselves with us, on the syllogistic reasoning that:

The gods are self-sufficient and contented

they would not be so if they concerned themselves with us

therefore they do not concern themselves with us.

The reader must no longer believe the old 'poetic' tales of gods demanding human sacrifice and fighting each other over human beings, as told in Homer and Hesiod: gone, too, the need to placate angry deities before they punish us with (e.g.) a plague³ or a thunderbolt⁴. Epicurean theology is very different from the stuff of 'heroic' superstition which has humans and gods mating and fighting: the tales

² see Taylor (1980) 105-124

³ such as in Sophocles *Oedipus Tyrannus* or Homer *Iliad* i

⁴ cf. Aeschylus *Seven Against Thebes* 444f, *Agamemnon* 468-70, Herodotus 7.10

of love and strife between and among gods and humans make for good stories, but they do not amount to much as theology, and Epicurus' theological thinking, by contrast, might be seen as poor encouragement to a 'traditional' poet. As will be seen, however, Epicurus' view of the gods is radical and accords well with his ethical views of human happiness: between Pindar's 'one is the race of gods and men'⁵ and Lucretius' apotheosis of Epicurus is a clear line of reasoning.

Lucretius nails his militantly anti-theological colours to the mast very quickly. No sooner has Book 1 got under way when we are treated to a garish account of human sacrifice to discredit state religion, and the fool who believes in the teleological explanation of natural phenomena is ridiculed throughout the poem⁶, just as the pious man who believes that the gods might make him fertile⁷, and the superstitious believer in torments (or anything else) after death⁸ are both mocked. The Epicurean view of indifferent gods - in contrast to the superstitious caricatures - is stated within a couple of pages of the opening of the poem:

omnis enim per se divom natura necessest
 immortalī aevō summa cum pace fruatur
 remota ab nostris rebus seiunctaque longe;
 nam privata dolore omni, privata periclis,
 ipsa suis pollens opibus, nil indiga nostri,
 nec bene promeritis capitur neque tangitur ira⁹

⁵ *Nemean* 6.1-2

⁶ 2. 167-82, 4. 823-57, 5.110-234, 6. 379-422

⁷ 4. 1233-41

⁸ 3. 830-1094

⁹ 1. 44-49

and repeated several times¹⁰. The gods do not live in the world as their nature is too fine to be touched by coarse things; Epicurus and Cicero imagine the gods to live in the *intermundia* or μετακόσμια, although Lucretius' only comment on the abode of the gods is a version of Homer¹¹:

apparet divum numen sedesque quietae
 quas neque concutiunt venti nec nubila nimbis
 aspergunt neque nix acri concreta pruina
 cana cadens violat semperque innubilus aether
 integit, et large diffuso lumine ridet.
 omnia suppeditat porro natura neque ulla
 res animi pacem delibat tempore in ullo.¹²

where the gods' physical independence and untouchability is singled out for emphasis.

It is no accident that this description of the abode of the gods comes straight after the praise of the Epicurus, the one man who deserved the title of god¹³ - and it would appear to follow that to live like a god means to live like Epicurus, who earned the title for himself. There are some important conclusions to be drawn from the paraphrase of Homer in the context of the apotheosis of Epicurus.

In the first place, Lucretius' gods are nothing like Homer's gods¹⁴. Homer's gods are such by virtue of their power and immortality, not because of their nirvana-like peace; in many cases they display powers superior to those of men but their behaviour is fundamentally

¹⁰ 2. 646-51, 1093-4, 5.82, 148-52, 6.73

¹¹ *Odyssey* 6. 42-6, on which see Kenney ad loc. and West (1969) 31-3

¹² 3. 18-24

similar. They fight and mate with each other and humans, they beget children and weep over their death such as Ares over his dead son Ascalaphus¹⁵ or Zeus over Sarpedon¹⁶. At the death of Sarpedon, Glaucus complains that Zeus has ignored the suffering of his own child¹⁷ which is ironic as we have witnessed the grief of Zeus who, for all his powers, is not able to save his son. The gods of epic, like those of tragedy, are often seen by human beings as carefree and unconcerned with man, their deathless life a cynical abandonment to selfish hedonism. This sets up a contrast with the poet's view who sees the suffering of gods, who cannot die (and so cannot be in a full sense heroic) but who can experience the pathos as well as comic enjoyment of life. None of this finds its way into the *de rerum natura*, whose gods are seen in dreams as images¹⁸, capable of movement but not susceptible of any outside interference, thus rendering Homer, Glaucus and indeed Zeus offside. The nearest we get to the gods of Homer in the poem is the embrace of Mars and Venus¹⁹ reminiscent of the love-making of Zeus and Hera²⁰ with its similar association of the divine embrace and the fertility of nature all around²¹ as well as the obvious parallel of Ares and Aphrodite²² which will be pursued further later on.

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- 13 3.15, 5.7-12
 - 14 on this topic see Godwin (1993)
 - 15 Homer *Iliad* 15.116-8
 - 16 Homer *Iliad* 16. 458-61
 - 17 Homer *Iliad* 16. 521-2
 - 18 5. 1169-82
 - 19 1. 31-40
 - 20 Homer *Iliad* 14. 153-351
 - 21 Homer *Iliad* 14. 347-9
 - 22 Homer *Odyssey* 8. 266-366

Lucretius' gods do not do anything²³ in the world - one reason why their abode is given such lavish detail as their daily life of divine inactivity can hardly be described; whereas Homer's gods are imperfect players on the stage who will win and lose against each other and against men, Lucretius sees the gods as perfect beings incapable of either harming or being harmed in any way²⁴.

In the second place, Lucretius places his gods in a paradise where everything is provided by nature and nothing exists to wrinkle the divine brow. This is quite unlike the slow crawl of men from animal to human existence; progress achieved by trial and error and resulting in a form of society which is materially superior to the primitive state but morally as backward as ever, as we saw in chapter two. This is also not in Homer, for whom the gods simply 'enjoy themselves all their days'.²⁵ The divine independence is stressed by Epicurus who places it as the first of his *Kuriai Doxai*²⁶; he seems to be stressing that their freedom from cares is what makes them gods just as much as the constant regeneration of their bodies. When Epicurus says that divinity does not *πράγματα ἔχει* he is setting up two distinct ideas: gods do not have anything to do (*πρᾶγμα* in its literal sense of 'doing') and also gods 'do not cause trouble'²⁷. The first sense appears to be elevating idleness to a virtue, and Cicero's Cotta complains²⁸ of Epicurean gods

23 except perhaps commit adultery as in l. 29-40

24 as proved in atomic terms at 5. 146-54

25 Homer *Odyssey* 6. 46

26 Diogenes Laertius 10. 139

27 cf. LSJ s.v. *πρᾶγμα* III.5 citing e.g. Hdt 1.155, 7.147

28 Cicero *de natura deorum* 1.102

for having no *negotium*, but other ancient authors are less worried by the prospect of idleness: look at Hesiod's men of the 'golden race' who:

ὥστε θεοὶ δ' ἔζων, ἀκηδέα θυμὸν ἔχοντες,
 νόσφιν ἄτερ τε πόνου καὶ οἰζύος· οὐδέ τι δειλὸν
 γῆρας ἐπῆν, αἰεὶ δὲ πόδας καὶ χεῖρας ὁμοῖοι
 τέρποντ' ἐν θαλίῃσι κακῶν ἔκτοσθεν ἀπάντων·
 θνήσκον δ' ὥσθ' ὕπνῳ δεδμημένοι· ἐσθλὰ δὲ πάντα
 τοῖσιν ἔην· καρπὸν δ' ἔφερε ζεῖδωρος ἄρουρα
 αὐτομάτῃ πολλόν τε καὶ ἄφθονον· οἱ δ' ἐβελημοί
 ἥσυχοι ἔργ' ἐνέμοντο σὺν ἐσθλοῖσιν πολέεσσιν
 ἀφνειοὶ μήλοισι, φίλοι μακάρεσσι θεοῖσιν.²⁹

This is a close parallel to the picture of Lucretius' carefree gods who simply enjoy existence. Hesiod's men of the golden race did not suffer grief and pain like Homer's gods; as they were not gods they did have to die but the gods and men still sprang from the same source³⁰.

Lucretius of course has it both ways. He adopts and adapts the imagery of the golden age - where men and gods walked together and were happy in the springtime of the world - and adapts it to Epicurean theology which teaches that such interplay of god and man can never have taken place. The reader is thus teased with a set of images with which she will be familiar but whose value as cultural history he will be taught to reject. The philosophy does not violate the strictures of Epicurean theology but gives the divine *autarkeia* espoused by Epicurus

its most moving and sublime evocation ever. We are thus free from the gross anthropomorphism found in traditional epic and criticised by philosophers and poets for centuries; his gods are not the schemers of Homer and tragedy. Yet neither are they faceless verities or the Platonic Forms; and this is surely the poet's ethical motive in using the Hesiodic 'golden race' language of the gods; to establish the contiguity between ideal human and ideal divine life which provides a bridge between the two states as an assurance of the availability of this sort of life for men as well as for gods, if they follow the master and avoid unhealthy fears. This playing on the common ground between man and god in turn allows Lucretius to 'deify' Epicurus and thereby incorporate the traditional language of heroic panegyric more normally associated with 'real' demigods such as Hercules. The reader will see the depiction of divine life in 3. 18-24 as an amalgamation of the happy gods of Homer and the happy men of Hesiod, thereby consolidating the concept of the 'divine life' attained by men with a literary amalgamation which captures it in language with which the reader is already familiar. Once again, literary effects can have surprising philosophical and protreptic results.

This still leaves the moral and ethical side of the gods unaccounted for. Fear of divine punishment was apparently a major fact of life in the ancient world: 'many individuals appear to have lived

30 *Hesiod Works and Days* 108; cf. *Pindar Nemean* 6.1-2 'one is the race of gods and men'

their lives in constant dread' asserts Rist³¹. Lucretius tells that it was Epicurus who dispelled this fear and freed us from our slavery

humana ante oculos foede cum vita iaceret
in terris oppressa gravi sub religione
quae caput a caeli regionibus ostendebat
horribili super aspectu mortalibus instans³²

and certainly Epicurus' and Lucretius' description of the divine *ataraxia* and *autarkeia* leaves no room for any divine concern about *our* behaviour, either to each other or to them. In the first place they are out of contact with us and so do not even see (let alone care) what we do; in the second place they are not moved by our activities or feelings³³ and so cannot accept our sacrifices which being *tactile* are not touchable by their superfine bodies³⁴ nor can they be angry therefore when such rituals are not performed. Anyone who looks to the gods for vengeance will be disappointed as they are not even looking at our sufferings and sins and so a whole tradition of (e.g.) Zeus Horkios and Zeus Xeinios³⁵ is discarded with a stroke of the pen, just as is the tradition of appeasing their 'wrath' with 'supplication' when natural disaster strikes³⁶; once again we are close to the comic ridicule of the ἥττων λόγος in Aristophanes' *Clouds* who points out the incongruity between regarding the gods as guardians of moral behaviour and their own shocking record

31 Rist (1972) 147

32 1.62-5

33 Cicero *de natura deorum* 1.18

34 5. 150-1

35 see e.g. Homer *Odyssey* 6. 206-8

36 e.g. Livy 25.12.15

of sleaze³⁷ which in turn moved Plato to banish tragedy from his republic³⁸.

'The Justice of Zeus' is thus a joke for Lucretius; and if the gods are icons of moral excellence then the wise man will be as indifferent to others' sins and sufferings as the gods are. The pursuit of *autarkeia* will involve this essential element of being able to live a life of pleasure untroubled by sin and suffering in ourselves and others. The paradeigmatic role of the gods - even though they are unaware of us using them in this way - is well brought out by Obbink³⁹:

'Epicurus seems to have substituted for the causal and governing roles accorded to the divine in earlier Greek philosophy the notion, already familiar from Plato and Aristotle, of the divine as a normative object of *moral* emulation (*ὁμοίωσις θεῶν*). Since, for Epicurus, the gods share with men pleasure as an ethical *telos*, and since our conceptions of them embody the Epicurean ideals of blessedness and tranquillity, the gods stand in relation to the wise virtually as paradigms of moral excellence. Their example is to be imitated, a consideration which accounts for Epicurus' insistence that we conceive of the gods as anthropomorphic and capable of speech. While the intervention of the gods in the world is ruled out by its incompatibility with their own blessedness, they do nevertheless have a very real, if indirect, influence on the world of humans, inasmuch as one's own view of the gods would

37 e.g. Aristophanes *Clouds* 1080-2
 38 see Plato *Republic* 391E
 39 Obbink (1996) 9

naturally have a major impact for better or worse on one's own *διάθεσις* or psychosomatic constitution.'

Diogenes Laertius informs us of Epicurus' piety towards the gods⁴⁰ and Philodemus tells us that Epicurus 'loyally observed all the forms of worship and enjoined upon his friends to observe them, not only on account of the laws but for physical reasons as well. For in *On Lifecourses* he says that to pray is natural for us, not because the gods would be hostile if we did not pray, but in order that, according to the understanding of beings surpassing in power and excellence, we may realise our fulfilments and social conformity with the laws...'⁴¹ It has been a source of much scholarly debate to investigate just how a man who professes divine indifference can pray.

So why did Epicurus worship them? In the first place there is the element of conformity with the laws of the land; Epicurus 'advised obedience to the laws and customs of one's own country as a means of living a life untroubled by political storms'⁴² but Obbink has good reasons to wonder what (if any) limit the Epicurean would place on such conformity of worship:

'But will the Epicureans at Athens keep the Spartan Karneia or the Persian Mithrakana or the Roman Feralia? (cf. Lucretius' ambivalence towards the Magna Mater at Rome.) Is there justification

⁴⁰ Diogenes Laertius 10.10

⁴¹ Philodemus *On Piety* 1.26.730-750 (translation by Obbink (1996) 157)

⁴² Rist (1972) 157

in Epicurus' tenets for participation in the religious rites of every deity, including Isis, Cybele, Attis (i.e. cults of dying or suffering gods), Mithra, Zeus Hypsistos, cults of rulers?...What about rituals of purification or traditional rites of mourning (since, according to Epicurus, death is "nothing to us")?⁴³

Worshipping weird gods with one's tongue in one's cheek is hardly a recipe for the life inspired by the true light of reason or the quiet life - especially where the rites involve human sacrifice such as that of Iphigeneia. A better set of reasons is available if we examine what Philodemus might mean by what he calls *φυσικὰς αἰτίας*⁴⁴. Religious worship has to be shown to be actually good for our bodily and mental *physis* and Lucretius, as often, supplies more information:

quae nisi respuis ex animo longeque remittis
dis indigna putare alienaque pacis eorum
delibata deum per te tibi numina sancta
saepe oberunt; non quo violari summa deum vis
possit, ut ex ira poenas petere inbibat acris,
sed quia tute tibi placida cum pace quietos
constitues magnos irarum volvere fluctus,
nec delubra deum placido cum pectore adibis,
nec de corpore quae sancto simulacra feruntur
in mentes hominum divinae nuntia formae,
suscipere haec animi tranquilla pace valebis.
inde videre licet qualis iam vita sequatur.⁴⁵

Lucretius seems to be angry that men should hold wrong opinions about the gods and threatens punishment as a result. He

⁴³ Obbink (1996) 392

⁴⁴ Philodemus *On Piety* 1. 26. 736-7

⁴⁵ 6. 68-79

appears to be undermining his own premises, however, by alluding to the famous stories of divine vengeance (Niobe, Pentheus etc) - the language of 70-1 (*delibata...oberunt*) offers no other meaning - but then he qualifies this with a mocking rejection of the sagas of 'avenging gods'. After all, their peace and holiness can hardly allow them to be seen venting their fury on insolent mortals. So the 'damage' done to the gods is one of reducing their divine powers (*numina*) and yet the poet goes on to assert that the gods cannot be damaged by men (*sancta* has a strong sense of 'inviolable'⁴⁶) and that they would not become angry and vengeful; the first and last words of line 70 thus appear to contradict each other.

Lucretius has stated that the false opinions of the gods will hurt us and it is superficially plausible to see this 'hurt' as being the impairment of our own *ataraxia* by believing in terrifying stories of divine wrath (line 74); this is the interpretation of Ernout. Does it makes sense of the contradiction of *delibata... sancta*? The gods themselves are *sancta* but can we 'lessen' their 'force' upon us by wreaking havoc with our own (note the emphasis of *tute tibi*) mental peace? Surely such actions are an increase of supposed divine power over us rather than a decrease? If, after all, the gods in fact take no part in our lives, then any change from this (caused by our superstition) will be an increase rather than the reverse?

⁴⁶ see OLD s.v. 'sanctus' 1; and cf. the ironic use of the word in 2. 434-5 where if the *divum numina* are really *sancta* then they will not feel *tactus* at all.

Lucretius' twist of the argument is to argue that the 'loss' is of what Bailey calls 'communion with the gods', i.e. the ability to apprehend the truth of the gods. The fog of our superstitious beliefs will cause their natures to remain hidden. The poet teases us with the paradox that the gods will 'punish' us for our faults but that they would not do so if they were not carefree and indifferent to us. Lucretius rejects the *do ut des* attitude towards religious worship and instead substitutes a 'contemplative' view of the gods whereby the benevolence of the gods is obtained when we contemplate the divine serenity and absorb the *simulacra* of such serenity into ourselves. Their influence is thus aesthetic.

This is also clear from Book 5. 1161-1240, where the poet explains the origins of religion. Men right from early days had visions of the gods which they endowed with sensation as they appeared to move and act; in ignorance of the real causes of things they attributed the ordering of the world and the heavens to the gods, thus causing misery and anxiety to themselves. Lucretius mocks the superstitious rituals of man:

o genus infelix humanum, talia divis
 cum tribuit facta atque iras adiunxit acerbis!
 quantos tum gemitus ipsi sibi, quantaque nobis
 volnera, quas lacrimas peperere minoribu' nostris!
 nec pietas ullast velatum saepe videri
 vertier ad lapidem atque omnis accedere ad aras,
 nec procumbere humi prostratum et pandere palmas
 ante deum delubra, nec aras sanguine multo
 spargere quadrupedum, nec votis nectere vota,
 sed mage placata posse omnia mente tueri.⁴⁷

The mumbo-jumbo of ritual is here scornfully dissected as men turn towards the stone, lie on the ground⁴⁸, spatter the altars⁴⁹ with blood of quadripeds⁵⁰ and weaves chains of prayers; the language is calculated to express scorn, from the alliteration of line 1200⁵¹ and the polyptoton of endless prayers in *votis..vota* to the ritual archaic language of the infinitive *vertier* and the term *quadrupedum*. Costa sees the word *videri* as signifying ostentation⁵², and so it might: the word has a deeper significance however when one gets to the end of the passage. True religion for Lucretius is not to be seen by unseeing gods but rather to *see* (*tueri*) everything with a peaceful mind. The past participle *pacata* has the advantage over (e.g.) *placida* that it is made up of three long slow syllables; but also the word has the sense that our minds do not start out as *placidus* by nature but that they become so by worshipping the gods. This is exactly how we can alter our nature to become more 'divine' - and this is presumably what Philodemus meant by *φυσικὰς αἰτίας*. Religion - true religion is good for us if we see the untroubled nature of the gods and emulate it in our lives.

Clearly the contemplative element of religion is vital to this thesis. If true religion is *placata posse omnia mente tueri* then the ethical ideal of aesthetic contemplation of the world rather than engaging in it directly takes on a religious as well as a human dimension.

48 recalling 1.63 *in terris oppressa gravi sub religione*
 49 like the infertile man at 4. 1236-8
 50 such as that of the calf in 2. 352-366
 51 noted by Costa ad loc.
 52 Costa (1984) 135

It is no coincidence that the passage in book 5 where the poet describes false and then true religion⁵³ begins with early man astounded at the aesthetic qualities of the gods as they appeared to him:

egregias animo facies vigilante videbant,
et magis in somnis mirando corporis auctu.
his igitur sensum tribuebant propterea quod
membra movere videbantur vocesque superbas
mittere pro facie praeclara et viribus amplis.⁵⁴

where the primacy of the visual is stressed (*videbant... videbantur*) as is also the wonder this provoked (*egregias... mirando... praeclara... amplis*). Men even then (*iam tum*) had a philosophically respectable concept of gods formed of aesthetic judgements rather than anything else; but this later was perverted into superstitious terror supported (again) by what we see:

nam cum suspicimus magni caelestia mundi
templa super stellisque micantibus aethera fixum.⁵⁵

this later becomes a reminder of the opening of book 2 as the wretched mortals are filled with fear at a vignette of the terrors of war combined with a storm at sea⁵⁶:

summa etiam cum vis violenti per mare venti
induperatorem classis super aequora verrit
cum validis pariter legionibus atque elephantis

recalling the storm of 2.1-2 and the military commander of 2. 5-6 and 2. 40-43, a neat reminder that the aesthetic attitude espoused in book 2 of being able to derive pleasure from such sights is here being reclaimed for a religious purpose as part of the poet's ideal *pacata posse omnia mente*

⁵³ 5. 1183-1203

⁵⁴ 5. 1170-4

tueri. The mighty empires of men and their pre-occupations are dismissed here, as in book 2, by the poet as 'a kind of darkness - the darkness of the contemporary and infantile view of the world. They are *ludibria*.⁵⁷ Clay goes on to quote the poet's general conclusion given in book 5:

usque adeo res humanas vis abdita quaedam
opterit et pulchros fascis saevasque securis
proculcare ac ludibrio sibi habere videtur.⁵⁸

but does not see the theatrical edge in *ludibrio*, which he acknowledges as an illusion⁵⁹ but whose range of meaning extends to the theatrical imposturing and sham which the poet sees in public life⁶⁰ and which its derivation from *ludus* makes abundantly clear. It is again impressive how the words are again an echo of the opening of book 2:

quod si ridicula haec ludibriaque esse videmus⁶¹

The wise man, and the truly religious man, watch both the world and the gods with impassive pleasure as if watching a show. They differ from the rest of mankind in that they see what is really *ludibria* in real life and are not terrified by it any more than they are by the show in the theatre.

The next stage in the argument is to examine the nature of the Lucretian gods in more detail against the background of epic. We do

⁵⁵ 5. 1204-5

⁵⁶ 5. 1226-8

⁵⁷ Clay (1983) 220

⁵⁸ 5. 1233-5

⁵⁹ Clay (1983) 334 n.130, citing Curtius 4.15.26

⁶⁰ see OLD s.v. 'ludibrium' 4; e.g. Livy 37.41.12, Martial 10.4.7

not need to investigate the vexed philosophical questions of the divine nature⁶² here; what is important is to see what use Lucretius made of the gods in determining his ethical and aesthetic attitudes.

The gods of Homer are proverbially *μάκαρες*⁶³ as are some men⁶⁴ in the poem; they are deathless and 'enjoy themselves all their days'⁶⁵. Part of this enjoyment is doubtless the entertainment they receive from watching each other and the human race. 'One of the most striking features of the *Iliad* is that the gods are constantly present as an audience.' is the opening sentence of an article of enormous importance for this thesis.⁶⁶ Griffin points out that 'a god who watches is normally a god who intervenes, a patron and an avenger⁶⁷' but that the gods watch the events of the Trojan war in two different ways: as spectators enjoying the show as if it were just entertainment⁶⁸ on the one hand, and as spectators of tragedy with tears in their eyes on the other⁶⁹. Human beings in the poem show confidence in the gods' interest in right and wrong - calls to the gods to witness events bespeak this sort of confidence in the divine urge to avenge wrong, just as does the usage of *περιόρᾶν* in the sense of 'overlook, i.e. allow'⁷⁰. The attitude of the gods is often the sort of *Schadenfreude* one expects in comedy: this

⁶¹ 2. 47

⁶² on which see e.g. Rist (1972) 140-156, Bailey (1928) 449-467, Festugière (1955) 51-72

⁶³ see e.g. Homer *Iliad* 1.339, *Odyssey* 10.299

⁶⁴ e.g. Homer *Iliad* 3.182

⁶⁵ Homer *Odyssey* 6.46

⁶⁶ Griffin (1978) 1

⁶⁷ as e.g. Apollo in Book 1

⁶⁸ Griffin cites: *Iliad* 4. 1-4, 7.61, 8.51-2

⁶⁹ e.g. 16.430-3, 8. 350, 22. 166-70

mirth⁷¹ 'proceeds from a delighted sense of one's own superiority; at ease oneself, one enjoys the spectacle of others struggling or humiliated for one's pleasure.'⁷² In the song of Demodocus, for instance, Hephaistus tricks the adulterous Ares and Aphrodite and then invites the gods to come and look so that they enjoy laughing at the sight;⁷³ some of the gods invest the spectacle with moral force (οὐκ ἀρετᾷ κακὰ ἔργα 329) but this is undermined both in the subsequent dialogue where Hermes wishes he could sleep with Aphrodite and in the way the pair of them escape all consequences of their actions. The gods of Homer do not need moral compunctions as men do and part of their 'blessedness' is this freedom from moral sanctions.

Of all the 'mythical' stories of Homeric gods, this is the only one to find a place in the *de rerum natura* in the Romanised form of Venus and Mars embracing.⁷⁴ The significance of the passage has been much discussed, but this parallel has not been given sufficient attention in the welter of words unpacking the Empedoclean symbolism when, as Bailey points out,⁷⁵ Mars 'appears to be in these verses nothing more or less than the Greco-Roman god of war, Ares-Mars.' If one examines the vital few lines in Lucretius:

effice ut interea fera moenera militiæ
per maria ac terras omnis sopita quiescant;

70 LSJ s.v. II
71 over Aias falling in cow-dung at 23.786
72 Griffin (1978) 6
73 Homer *Odyssey* 8. 325-7
74 l. 31-40
75 Bailey (1947) i. 590

nam tu sola potes tranquilla pace iuvare
 mortalis, quoniam belli fera moenera Mavors
 armipotens regit, in gremium qui saepe tuum se
 reiicit aeterno devinctus vulnere amoris
 atque ita suspiciens tereti cervice reposta
 pascit amore avidos inhians in te, dea, visus,
 eque tuo pendet resupini spiritus ore.
 hunc tu, diva, tuo recubantem corpore sancto
 circumfusa super, suavis ex ore loquellas
 funde petens placidam Romanis, incluta, pacem:
 nam neque nos agere hoc patriai tempore iniquo
 possumus aequo animo nec Memmi clara propago
 talibus in rebus communi desse saluti⁷⁶.

we find the passage first linked backwards with the opening prelude's universal panorama (*per maria ac terras*) and forwards with the notion of sleeping (*sopita*). The goddess has the supreme Epicurean quality of *tranquilla pace* to offer men (note also the way line 32 begins with *mortalis* and ends with *Mavors* punning on the derivation of the name Mavors from *mors*). We are mortals, but they are not; and the wound of love is accordingly *aeterno*. He 'feeds' his love⁷⁷ from the sense of sight: *suspiciens... visus*; and the object of the poet's prayer is again *placidam... pacem* which appears to be a prayer for military peace but may well in the Epicurean context be rather a reference to *ataraxia*. Rome was of course in the throes of civil war at the time, and there is abundant reason for the poet to pray for release from this; but when this picture and this prayer is immediately followed by a theological summary of the tranquillity of the gods one begins to wonder if the divine peace is more than merely freedom from civil war and more a state of mind.

⁷⁶ 1. 29-43

⁷⁷ cf. 4.1068

When we go back to the Homeric original, we see that the whole episode is one of seeing. The sun-god Helios sees the guilty pair and tells the wretched Hephaistos, who then contrives to make their adultery into a theatrical show for the rest of the gods. Hephaistos himself is a figure of visual fun in the *Iliad*⁷⁸ and here he appropriately turns his misery⁷⁹ into laughter, transforming pain into pleasure in a visual manner without any 'moral' conclusion being drawn or imposed by the poet. Gods, it seems, are there to enjoy themselves as aesthetic hedonists⁸⁰ and thus make a good role-model for Lucretius' ethical teaching. 'To complete their bliss they need one thing more: a subject to interest them. That subject is provided by the existence of mortal men and their *πόννοι*. The nature of men and gods is exactly calculated to set off and define that of each other. Thus as the life of the gods is blessed, so that of men is miserable: as they are typically *μάκαρες θεοί*, so *οἰζυροῖσι βροτοῖσι* is an Homeric phrase for "men" and *δειλοῖσι βροτοῖσι* is a common one...'⁸¹ The Homeric gods do show pity for wretched mortals, however: the Epicurean gods enjoy all the benefits of living like Homeric gods but without any toil or pity for us. It is hardly a surprise that Cicero satirised such gods for this:

⁷⁸ Homer *Iliad* 1. 599-600

⁷⁹ Homer *Odyssey* 8.273

⁸⁰ cf. *Odyssey* 1. 159 where the suitors are described in terms more appropriate to the life of gods but who pay for their arrogance

⁸¹ Griffin (1978 11; one thinks of the Lucretian imitation *mortalibus aegris* at 6.1

comprehende igitur et propone ante oculos deum nihil aliud in omni aeternitate nisi 'mihi pulchre est' et 'ego beatus sum' cogitantem.⁸² Nisbet and Hubbard⁸³ declare that (in a context of war as *spectacula*) 'the gods were assigned the role of bloodthirsty spectators' and cite a range of references⁸⁴, mentioning also the traditional 'insatiability' of Mars⁸⁵. Homer does not go so far, and neither does Lucretius; and yet the gods of Homer show concern for men and interest in their interests to a degree inconceivable in Epicurean deities.

Men, says Lucretius, can live the life of gods; this means in the first place that they can live the life of gods free of all cares and able to enjoy the spectacle of the world with pleasure. This grants the reader the status of the Homeric gods looking down on the world and enjoying the spectacle.

The irony here is that the 'real' gods in the poem do not care about *mortalibus aegris* at all and do not respond to our prayers or our mockery. This leaves us with the teasing paradox that we humans can live like Homeric gods if we aspire to the degree of detachment enjoyed by the Epicurean gods but also grant ourselves the Homeric gods' pleasure of watching the world - a pleasure which the Epicurean gods do not themselves have.

This is the aesthetic sense in which Epicurus was divine. He enjoyed the 'divine' freedom from fear of death and pain - though

⁸² Cicero *de natura deorum* 1.114, cited Griffin (1978) 13 n. 40

⁸³ Nisbet and Hubbard (1970) 331

⁸⁴ Seneca *dial.* 1.2.7, Luc. 6.3

⁸⁵ Horace *Odes* 1.2.37, cf. Homer *Iliad* 5.388

actually free of neither as his death makes all too clear.⁸⁶ He was however also capable of pitying mortal men and, like Prometheus, of bringing salvation to them⁸⁷ in a manner reminiscent of the Homeric gods: just as Athene brings help to the struggling Odysseus, for instance, or as Thetis aids her son. Epicurus behaved in this way like a Homeric god but in his doctrine taught us not to believe in such deities nor to behave like them ourselves; the ethical code is rather one of watching the world suffer without suffering ourselves, being capable of seeing the truth behind appearances and deriving pleasure from the view.

Epicurus was also the aesthetic epic hero, mastering the universe by the force of his eyes alone; he opened up the universe to human view and saw that the gods live a life of untroubled peace; he took on the force of *religio* which ground men underfoot and dared to outstare it, raising his eyes against it⁸⁸ and with them shattering the bolts of nature's gates. Seeing the truth was all that was necessary - and Epicurus did so.

Finally, the status of the aesthetic poet is left. The Homeric gods see everything and enjoy the spectacle; if we too are to live like gods, then we too are to see everything and enjoy the spectacle. The ethical advice to avoid engaging in the world actively but to contemplate the truths of philosophy raises us to the status of gods looking down on the world of men with superior wisdom and fearless pleasure. Poetry

⁸⁶ Diogenes Laertius 10.22

⁸⁷ 3. 14-30, 6. 1-34

⁸⁸ 1. 66-7

was always seen as the guarantor of immortality for the subject; and yet this poetry raises the reader - for all the proof of mortality in Book 3 - to the status of the immortal gods in his privileged position as spectator of the show - both tragic and comic - and also in his position as one with the ability to see behind the appearances into the heart of things to the truth. Poetry, finally, embodies the beauty of the world and thus allows the poet to demonstrate what he is describing, giving us textual proof of the aesthetic pleasure which he recommends as the ethical goal of philosophy itself.

CONCLUSION

This thesis began by examining the relative poverty of ethical material in a poem whose avowed aim is the 'conversion' of the reader to a new way of life. The ethical teaching which we find is based on the science and treats states of mind and body as being interdependent and themselves explicable in the same atomic terms which explain the rest of the universe. Pleasure is the *summum bonum* for all living things, and the thesis has attempted to demonstrate that the aesthetic pleasure of seeing and studying the nature of things is itself an ethical goal when it is elevated to a way of life which will pursue philosophy rather than politics and seek *ἀταραξία* rather than excitement. The watching of the world is a source of pleasure, and so (if pleasure is the highest good) this watching of the world is the ethical ideal to be followed. The watching of other men engaging in foolish behaviour is itself a source of pleasure, not because the poet maliciously enjoys *ἐπιχαρκεκακία* but for the same reasons that going to the theatre and seeing folly and suffering on stage is a source of pleasure to the audience.

For Lucretius, then, aesthetics and ethics are one and the same; the question of the proportion of ethics and physics has been answered in the manner in which the poet tells us that looking at the world is what we *ought* to do as our ethical goal. Seen in this light everything in the

poem is ethical, and the literary aesthetics being proposed is much wider and more all-embracing than many aesthetic theories which have followed his but quite in keeping with the aesthetics of the ancient world⁸⁹.

This aesthetic reading of the text rescues both sides of the familiar 'poet versus philosopher' debate. The apparently metaphrastic sections on such areas of science as the magnet and the waterspout become a source of aesthetic pleasure in themselves and thus show us *φυσιολογία* as a way of life, while other areas of atomic physics (such as the proofs of the mortality of the soul) are the essential factual basis for the naturalistic ethics being propounded. On the other hand the poetic mode of presentation embeds the pleasure of looking in the powerful medium of poetic (aesthetic) pleasure. Neither poetry nor Physics is 'mere' decoration – both serve the aesthetic ideal of detached pleasure in the world which the text recommends as the way of life for the Epicurean.

⁸⁹ 'Proponents of aesthetic autonomy are sometimes dismissive of the strong ancient tendency to connect both art and beauty to more general accounts of human needs and values. But it is part of the importance of this tendency that, notwithstanding its many internal modulations, it marks out a vital alternative to aesthetic self-sufficiency; an alternative which rests on the conviction that a historically sensitive aesthetics should engage with the intricate network of factors - psychological, ethical, religious, political - underlying the practices and categories of human culture.' OCD s.v. 'aesthetics' p. 30

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